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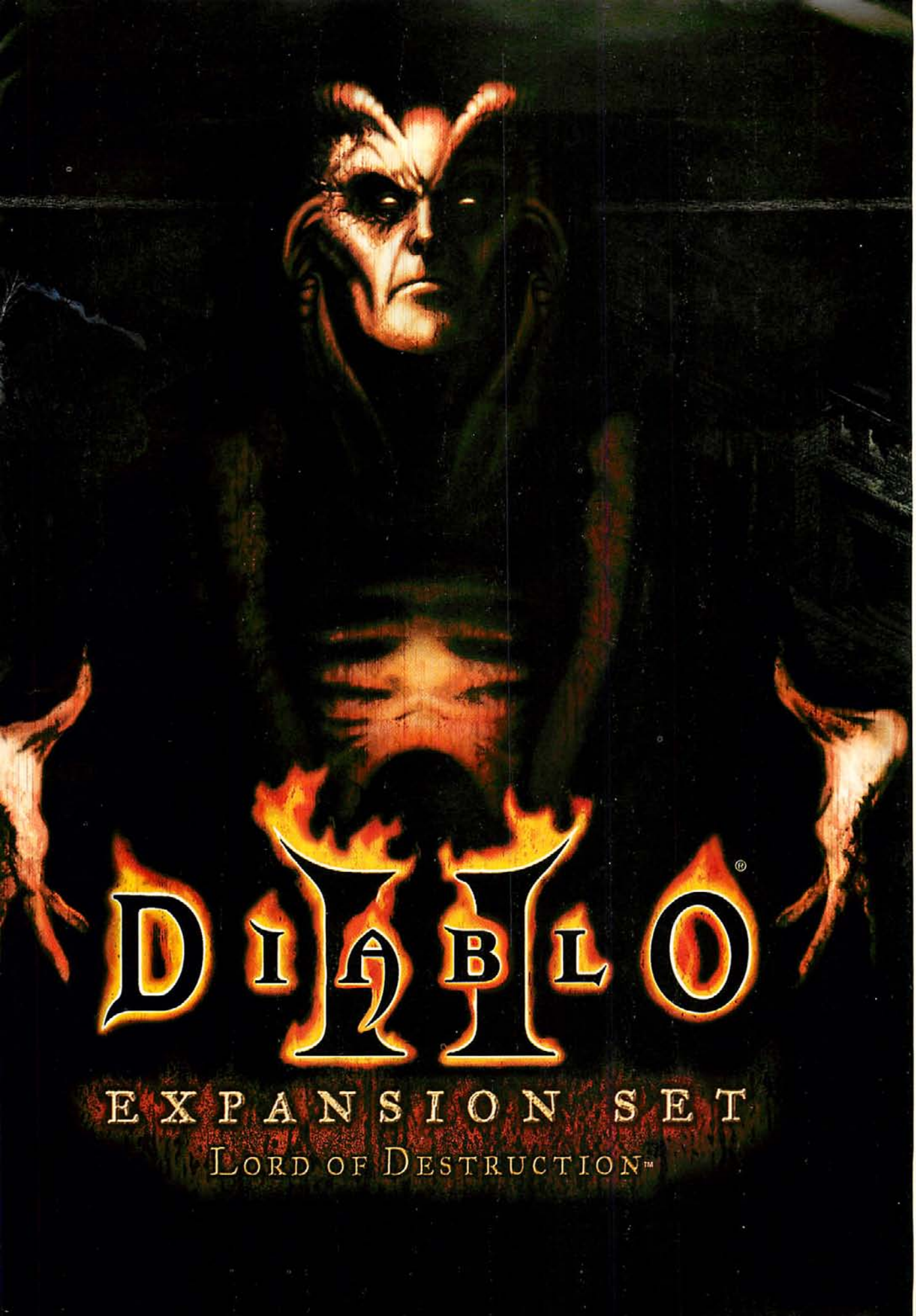
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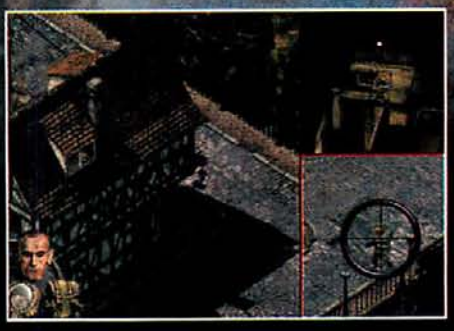
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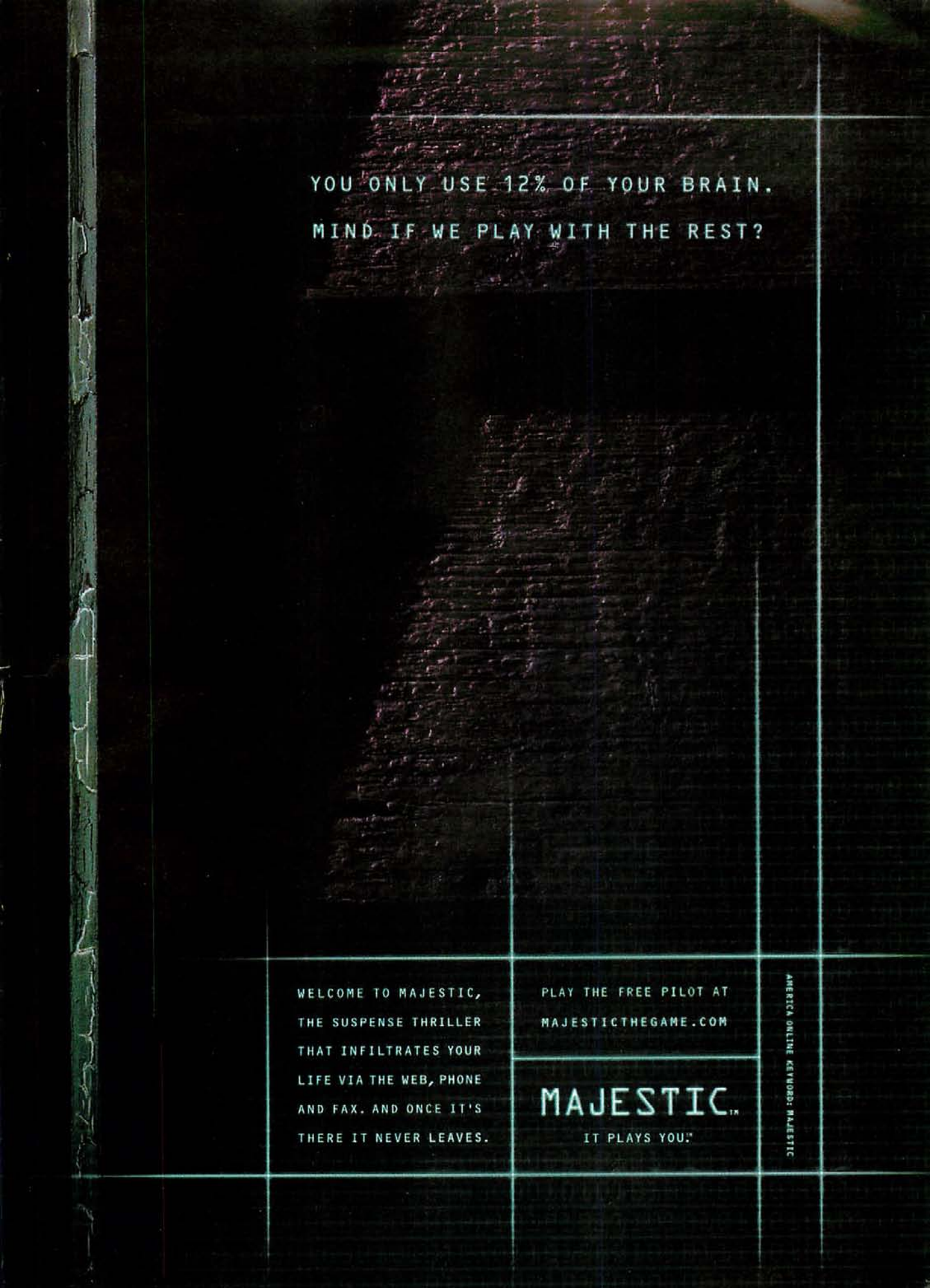
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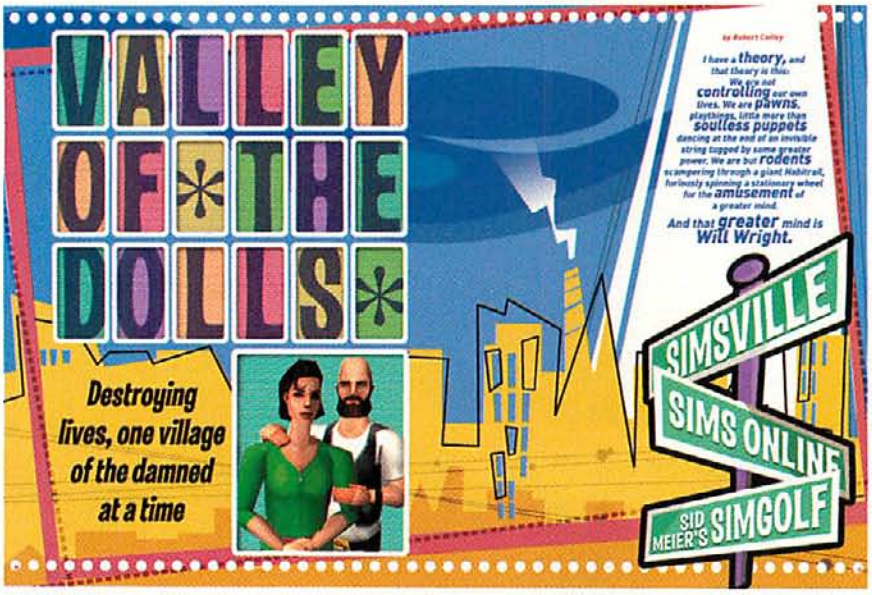


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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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SimsVille

If the thought of humanity evolving/devolving into digitized beings existing solely in a virtual environment frightens or enrages you, then grab your torch and pitchfork and start gathering outside Will Wright's house. THE SIMS franchise is growing, and we've got the details.

E3 ROUNDUP 54



Are PC games dead? That was the question on our minds as we trekked south to L.A. for the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo—four days of games, developers, publishers, babes, suits, and booze. To find out the answer, turn to page 55. Here's a hint: No.

PREVIEWS



Spider-Man

The superb PlayStation and Dreamcast game about everyone's favorite web-slinger is making its way to the PC. Our you-know-what is tingling. Page 40



Hands-On: Majestic

Jeff's more paranoid than usual after taking part in the MAJESTIC beta test. Will he ever answer the phone again? Page 44

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Learn Castro's secret techniques in TROPICO; become the most Immortal Sovereign of all in KOHAN; and get past the stupidest puzzles in MYST III: EXILE. Plus, we're running two whole pages of your dirtiest tricks.

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We know how you feel about E3's Booth Babes. Wouldn't it be nice to know how the Booth Babes feel about you?



Hardware 80

How'd you like a little home theater to go with your gaming hardware? While we're at it, how about a new and improved Killer Rigs section? Jigga what?! Jigga who?!

REVIEWS: Princeton Ai3.6HD • Paradigm Blockbuster Home Theater System • Logitech Cordless Freedom Pro

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STAFF EDITORIAL: THIERRY NGUYEN

First-Person Scooter

To those of you who've noticed that I am neither George Jones nor Jeff Green, I say "huzzah!"



Scooter as a mullet baby: We're not making this up.

Trapped in a confusing, transitional state, Jeff made a decision that could be considered either sheer brilliance or professional incompetence—he asked me to write this month's editorial. Merciless taskmaster that he is, he told me to do this days after promoting me. I sure feel like a "made guy," being asked to write in the same space that's been graced by Johnny Wilson, Charles Ardai, and George Jones. This is probably the closest I'll get to such a regular gig, so I better enjoy it while it lasts.

Funny thing is, I've been around as long as "the boss" has. I remember being a strapping young high-school lad, beating piles of dirt into the ground with the rest of the neighborhood scamps, and landing an interview with the Reverend Wilson himself. After talking about comic books with Johnny, I started my first day tabulating data from all those Top 100 index cards we used to have readers fill out.

I started a month after bossman Green did. In fact, I remember being introduced to him, and him telling me, while pointing at his bandaged ear, "I'm going for the van Gogh look nowadays." Yes, ladies and gentlemen, the burgeoning Jeff Green wit five years ago.

Five years of writing papers for school and articles for *CGW*. My U.C. Berkeley application and my GRIM FANDANGO review were due on the same day. I went to Microsoft's GameStock, then spent my flight home breaking down Faulkner's prose, hoping feverishly that my neurotransmitters would fire up and simultaneously produce both a story on the state of HALO and a paper on the significance of howling idiot Jim Bon in *Absalom! Absalom!* But now I leave the university behind, and get into this industry supposedly threatened by words like *GameCube*, *Xbox*, and *PS2*.

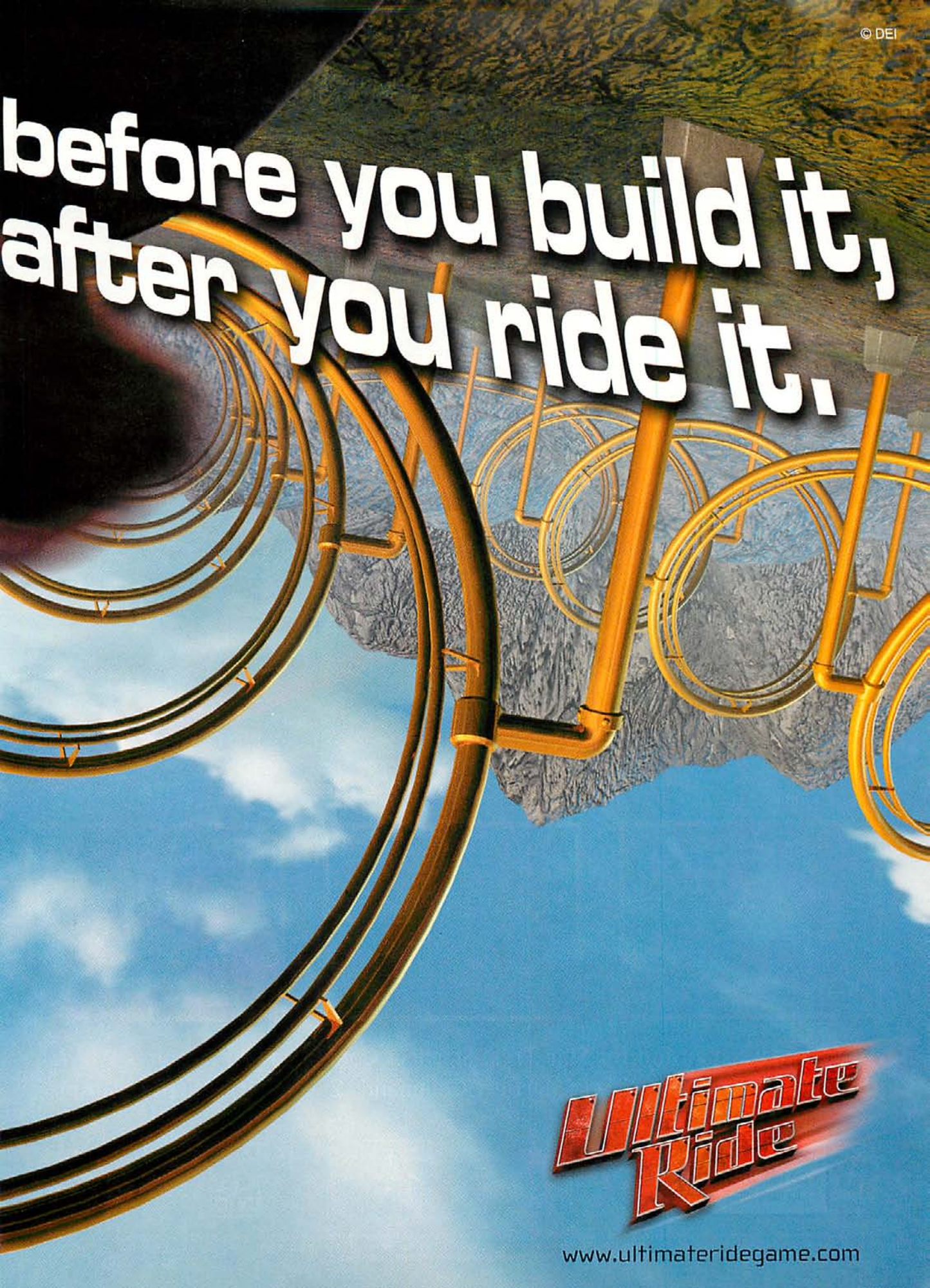
As you'll see later in these pages, E3 this year proved something I've learned in the five years I've worked here: PC gaming isn't dead. It's never going to be dead. Despite the threat of set-tops and uber-consoles, there'll always be ways for people to goof off on their computers. We've taken industrywide hits, ranging from senatorial attack to the rise and fall of companies and earlier consoles. We shrugged those off, and we're still kicking. Even in the '70s—when computers "made it big"—people scrambled to create and play even the simplest games on their green CRTs. As long as computers exist, we will want to game on them.

2001 is one helluva banner year. PC gaming is starting to get noticed. The millennium is beginning. Jeff Green is my boss. We've both been working the PC gaming beat for five years, and do I regret trading physics for an English degree? Friends and family still ask: Do I feel right landing in the gaming industry, rather than the defense industry?

Do I ever. CGW

Beginning this month, the Editorial *will rotate among* CGW *staff members rather than being written by Editor-in-Chief Jeff Green, since we don't trust him to get it in on time. You can still find his* GreenSpeak *column on the back page. If you have comments on this month's editorial, email Scooter at* thierry_nguyen@ziffdavis.com.

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LETTERS

Letter of the Month

Just a word of advice; if you want to use "Canadiana" for your ratings pics—ask a Canadian. Although I am Canadian, I have no idea what those guys in the five-star ratings pic (June, 2001) were, and neither did two of my Canadian friends. You were closer to the mark with Celine Dion, but I'd still only have rated her "weak"; we Canadians can do worse when it comes to music.

Now, if you'd asked me, I'd have suggested the attached ratings pics, and I think most of my fellow Canucks would agree.

Andy Halma

First of all, what kind of Canadian are you if you didn't recognize Neil Young (4 stars)? He's Canada's greatest export next to maple syrup. And as for your list, none of us can figure out who 5 and 3 are (if Gordon Lightfoot is one of them, we're invading), and we take umbrage to your placement of Anne Murray. What kind of a monster are you?

HOW DO WE RATE? We review only finished games — no betas, no patches.



OUTSTANDING The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

VERY GOOD Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

AVERAGE Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

WEAK Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

ABYSMAL The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

What's Wrong With Chicken Wings?

First, let me say great job with the magazine. I just bought my first subscription, though I have been an avid reader for over 10 years. OK, down to business. My buddy Dave keeps telling me to take out a small business loan and open my own game store. I've been thinking about this idea for a long time and I wanted to have you guys sign off on it before I go take out the $250,000. The name of the store will be: Porn-n-Video Games, kind of like a Hooters except with video games instead of chicken wings. I figured that I would bring the two very best things in the world together under one roof. Your one-stop shop for all your entertainment needs. My buddy Dave just called me an undisclosed name when I suggested it to him. I really think I've found a market; what do you guys think?

Gary Krantz

We agree with your buddy Dave. Now shake this idea out of your head, before we tell your mother.

You Made Our Artist Cry

I've read a couple of your recent issues in the past year, and there's always something that kinda bugs me about *CGW*. Yesterday, my brother pointed out what it is: the layout! I looked at some non-gaming magazines, then some gaming mags from Europe, and no offense, but it seems that their layout is much more sophisticated looking. Most of the layout for *CGW* seems lacking in direction and focus. On a lot of the pages for most of the sections, the layout is such that your eye is not really drawn to anything in particular, or even if it does have a focus, it may not be the most exciting thing on the page. Sometimes there's more than one area calling out for attention. Some two-page articles will be split by an ad, making you lose your train of thought. Sometimes it's not apparent what's an article and what's an ad. Now, this is not to say that all is a disaster! For example, in the June issue, the BLACK & WHITE article is pretty well done. It has a good balance of text and screenshots/art. There's almost a running theme on the pages for the layout! Well, that's just my opinion. *CGW* is a pretty good gaming magazine and I plan on reading more.

Tiffany Chu

Good points, Tiffany. We don't often get truly constructive criticism like that. Once we begin our redesign process we'll examine your points one by one, then discard them out of hand while rolling our eyes. Just kidding. Keep your eyes peeled for an all-new, much-less-ugly-looking CGW, coming soon.

The King of Literalism

I have to correct you on your comment about DIABLO 2 [June, 2001, Top 20]. You guys said "Not everyone loved it, but everyone bought it." Well I didn't buy it! I'm telling you this because you need to quit lying to everybody! Can you imagine if everyone really bought it?! Blizzard would have sold over 6 BILLION copies!! Holy crap that's a lot!

John Fawcett

Gee, Sorry You Didn't Get Your FREE Magazine

As I roamed the West Hall of E3 towards the Ziff Davis Publication Booth, my excitement was high. Through the loud music and massive amounts of people I saw the *Computer Gaming World* June cover. I was almost there, only a couple of feet more. But quickly my excitement went away after seeing just empty magazine slots filled with trash and a bunch of business-looking people sitting around talking. I was left with, "What the heck happened to their booth?! This sucks. And why is it in the console section?!" So what happened to your booth?

Red

What can we say? Our magazines flew out of the racks because everyone wanted a free copy, and as for the suits, well let's face it: It's really their show anyway. You find us a booth at E3 not overrun by business people—and with scads of good free stuff to hand out—and we'll overrun that place ourselves.

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LETTERS

Someone's Playing a Little Too Much FALLOUT TACTICS

In the FALLOUT TACTICS review by Raphael Liberatore [June, 2001], the following observation is made under one of the screenshots: "Every squad should contain at least one sniper character with the following perks: Better Criticals, Sharpshooter, More Criticals, Light Step, Ghost, Death Sense, Bonus Rate of Fire, and Strong Back." Wow! Where do I get one of those!?! I mean, we are talking nine perks here, people! And since one of those perks (Death Sense) can only be chosen by deathclaws, and since deathclaws only gain one perk per four levels, we are talking about a level 36 deathclaw with the heretofore unknown trait "Firearm Capable." I didn't realize that there were deathclaws that could use firearms! I didn't think it was possible to get a 36th-level character without cheating! The only thing I can figure is that it must be a Canadian deathclaw. Heck, I bet it's bilingual too! And cold-resistant! I am hoping *CGW* will do a special strategy section on how to find and train this Canadian Claw of Death. Please! Oh, wait! The tip said that every squad should contain AT LEAST ONE of these characters. You mean there's more than ONE Canadian Claw of Death in the Game!?!

James

Readers Respond to Our BLACK & WHITE Review

I was surprised when I read the reviews in the June issue of your magazine and saw that you had given BLACK & WHITE five stars. Based on your definition of a five-star game—"The rare game that gets it all right"—B&W certainly didn't deserve five stars. First of all, the movement interface is the worst I've ever seen. In a word (two actually), it sucks! They certainly didn't get that right. Then there are the bugs. When I took my creature to fight the ogre in the first map, it (my monkey) went into an endless meditation loop. It wouldn't interact with anything in the game, and I could no longer interact with it. It just stood there like a permanent feature of the landscape. Needless to say, since I could no longer stroke or spank my monkey, I had to start over (and had to go through the incredibly boring tutorial all over again). Don't get me wrong, I think you guys consistently put together a fine magazine, and your reviews are usually pretty good, but occasionally you miss the mark. *Computer Games* magazine gave B&W three out of five stars, which I think is a more accurate reflection of how good the game is.

S. D. McNeely

Wow, BLACK & WHITE must be a really good game to get 5 stars. The game is so cool and fun to play. You know why? I had a great time breaking that damn AOL disk and almost breaking my keyboard rack. Not to mention the tingling sensation in my hands. It felt wonderful to break my fist. No, I am not crazy. You guys forgot to mention all the bugs that were shipped with the game. How can you guys miss such obvious flaws? Maybe you guys are lucky you have a job that pays for your phat-assed computers and stuff, but we NORMAL folks have a limited budget. So please review the games on multiple computers to ensure compatibility. And be ready for a subpoena from my lawyers for my medical bills.

Joseph Simpson

It's Not Console Gaming World

I've noticed how you guys have bashed console games. Technical Editor Wil O'Neal said, "...it's a no-brainer that PCs will render Xbox obsolete in less than a year after its release." [Wil Power, May 2001]. Also, the headline says, "Don't worry too much about Xbox." While these quotes may be true, I think that the Xbox and other consoles will still be good competition for the PC. If I am correct, you people at *CGW* may not be getting the point. Gaming platforms revolve around the games... not the graphics, sound capability, nor other stuff. It's all nice, but think about it: You guys at *CGW* are playing freaking Game Boys. Game Boys have cruddy graphics...but we still play them—because of the games. If the console producers make awesome material, PC

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COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

PUBLISHER ..... LEE UNIACKE
lee_uniacke@ziffdavis.com

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF ..... JEFF GREEN
jeff_green@ziffdavis.com

EDITOR ..... KEN BROWN
(READ.ME) • ken_brown@ziffdavis.com

MANAGING EDITOR ..... HOLLY FLEMING
holly_fleming@ziffdavis.com

TECHNICAL EDITOR ..... WIL O'NEAL
(HARDWARE) • william_o'neal@ziffdavis.com

REVIEWS EDITOR ..... ROBERT COFFEY
(RPG, STRATEGY) • robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

PREVIEWS EDITOR ..... TOM PRICE
(SIMS, SPORTS) • tom_price@ziffdavis.com

STRATEGIES & TIPS EDITOR ..... THIERRY "SCOOTER" NGUYEN
(ACTION, GAMER'S EDGE) • thierry_nguyen@ziffdavis.com

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS ..... CHARLES ARDAI, MARK ASHER, GORDON BERG

ART DEPARTMENT

ACTING ART DIRECTOR ..... JASON BABLER
jason_babler@ziffdavis.com

CONTRIBUTING ART DIRECTOR ..... ANDREW BURWELL
andrew_burwell@ziffdavis.com

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT

MANUFACTURING DIRECTOR ..... CARLOS LUGO

SENIOR PRODUCTION MANAGER ..... ANNE MARIE MIGUEL

AD PRODUCTION COORDINATOR ..... TERESA NEWSON

PREMEDIA GROUP

PREMEDIA DIRECTOR ..... VICKI EGAN

PREMEDIA MANAGER ..... STEVE REIMERS

PREMEDIA TECHNICIAN ..... ROGER DRAKE

HOW TO CONTACT THE EDITORS

ADDRESS NON-SUBSCRIPTION RELATED QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK TO: CGW EDITORIAL, 50 BEALE STREET, 12TH FLOOR, SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105. OR YOU MAY CONTACT US VIA: CGWLETTERS@ZIFFDAVIS.COM PHONE: (415) 357-4900 • EDITORIAL FAX: (415) 357-4977.

WEB SITE: WWW.COMPUTERGAMING.COM

ADVERTISING & SALES DEPARTMENT

GROUP ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER ..... SUZANNE REIDER
suzie@ziffdavis.com • (415) 357-4915

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER/ MIDWEST TERRITORY ..... MARC CALLISON
marc_callison@ziffdavis.com • (630) 382-9034

DISTRICT SALES REPRESENTATIVE/ EAST COAST TERRITORY ..... TALLIE FISHBURNE
tallie_fishburne@ziffdavis.com • (617) 354-0284

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE/ MIDWEST AND EAST COAST TERRITORY ..... EMILY OLMAN
emily_olman@ziffdavis.com • (415) 357-5226

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER/ PACIFIC NORTHWEST AND BAY AREA PENINSULA ..... IAN SINCLAIR
ian_sinclair@ziffdavis.com • (415) 357-4925

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE/ PACIFIC NORTHWEST AND BAY AREA PENINSULA ..... MARY GRAY
mary_gray@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8782

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER/ SOUTHWEST TERRITORY ..... KAREN LANDON
karen_landon@ziffdavis.com • (760) 942-6277

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE/ SOUTHWEST TERRITORY ..... LINDA PHILAPIL
linda_philapil@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8781

REGIONAL SALES MANAGER/ TEXAS, WASHINGTON, SAN FRANCISCO TERRITORY ..... MARCI YAMAGUCHI
marciy@ziffdavis.com • (415) 357-4944

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE/ TEXAS, WASHINGTON, SAN FRANCISCO TERRITORY ..... MEIGHAN O'ROURKE
meighan_orourke@ziffdavis.com • (415) 357-4920

SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR ..... REY LEDDA
rey_ledda@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8775

MARKETING COORDINATOR ..... ANNIE LIPSCOMB
annie_lipscomb@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8248

ADVERTISING COORDINATOR ..... TIPLER UBBELOHDE
tipler_ubbelohde@ziffdavis.com • (415) 357-4930

SALES ASSISTANT ..... KRISTEEN LAUT
kristeen_laut@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8778

SALES ASSISTANT ..... CHERYL FARRELL
cheryl_farrell@ziffdavis.com • (415) 547-8783

HOW TO CONTACT ADVERTISING & SALES

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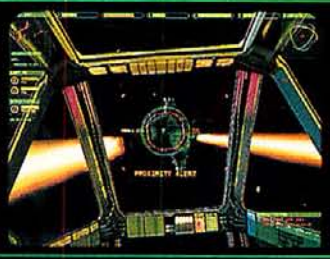
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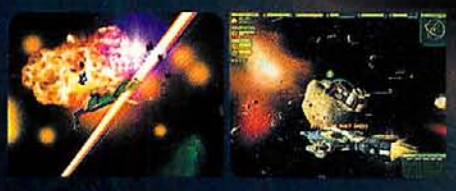
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- //> Explore the vast depths of the universe spanning 16 star systems









PARTICLE SYSTEMS

POWERED BY: gamespy

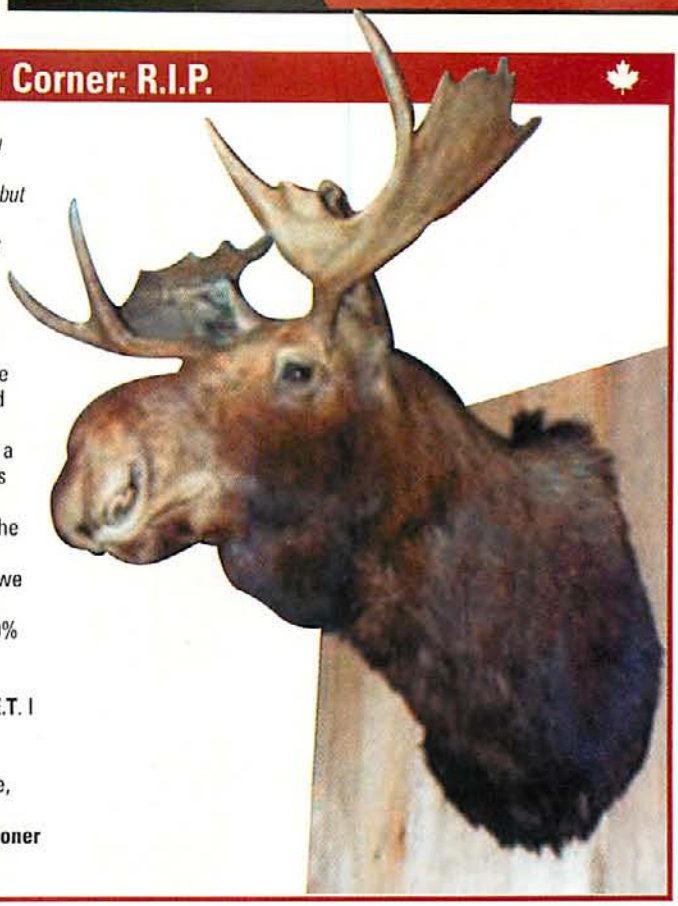
PC CD ROM

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Violence
Mild Language

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Canadian Corner: R.I.P.



It's been fun, but it's time to close down Canadian Corner. Why, you ask through tear-blurred eyes? Because it's just not funny anymore. Granted, some Canucks never thought it was funny in the first place, but of course it was their indignation that fanned the flames. So we've decided to be the bigger North Americans and call a truce. Just to let you mullet-sporting, french-fries-with-gravy-eating, Stanley Cup-losing fur-trappers know what high esteem we actually hold you in, here's a parting message from one of our American compatriots:

Before the Canadian bashing is brought to a close I would like to take a minute, as an American, and sum up some of the good things to come from Canada. Maybe it isn't the best country in the world, but it's certainly not the worst. To prove it, I've made a list of all the useful things to come out of Canada over the years and here it is:

1. That movie *Strange Brew*—Very funny and quite possibly the most accurate depiction of Canadians on the planet.
2. That tank they sent to fight WWII alongside their soldier—we couldn't have won it without it, and without him.
3. *Kids in the Hall*—Do all Canadian men dress like women 90% of the time?
4. Another name for ham so that we could put it on pizza.
5. Tom Green—C'mon, he nailed the chick from E.T., people, **E.T.** I cried at that movie.

And last but not least:

6. People to make fun of—It doesn't even have to make sense, as long as it pisses them off.

Xcomooner

Seriously, that's it. No more. We really, really mean it.

producers may get a run for their money. I myself am a PC gamer, barely touching consoles anymore. But when I realized how fun it was when I dusted off my Sega Genesis and played THUNDER FORCE III again, I saw that I was blinded by a bunch of crap thrown into our eyes to dazzle us, but that doesn't give us pure value. Well, that's my opinion.

Eric Lau

We agree with you more than you think, Eric, as most of the editors on the staff enjoy games of all kinds, on all platforms. We're just a little biased towards the ones that help pay our rent.

Should We Tell Him?

Who would I email to submit a letter to possibly be published in *CGW*? And what format should the email be in?

Jim Gordon

Well Jim, you accomplished the first part by sending it to the right place, and it was in English which satisfies the second part, so congratulations, you got your letter into CGW*!*

A Non-Believer Checks In

Your AGE OF MYTHOLOGY preview motivated me to buy your June issue, and I appreciated the thoroughness of that article, but count me among those disappointed by Ensemble's newest production. I'd been hoping to see a historical continuation of the AOE series, possibly into the Napoleonic era, and I was also hoping for a continuation of the "look" of the series (however dated its 2D technology may now be). Instead, along comes this magical mayhem mish-mash, with a 3D engine and effects that would probably strain my system past its limits. "Would," I say, because your preview did accomplish what I'd hoped from it, which was to give me a pretty good idea about whether I'll buy the game when it comes out, and my idea in this case is that unless Ensemble scraps this project and starts over along the lines I've mentioned, they and/or Microsoft ain't gonna get any of my bucks for it. Oh, I may load the demo when it comes out just so I can pretend to have given it a fair try, but color me profoundly prejudiced at this point.

Glenn Few

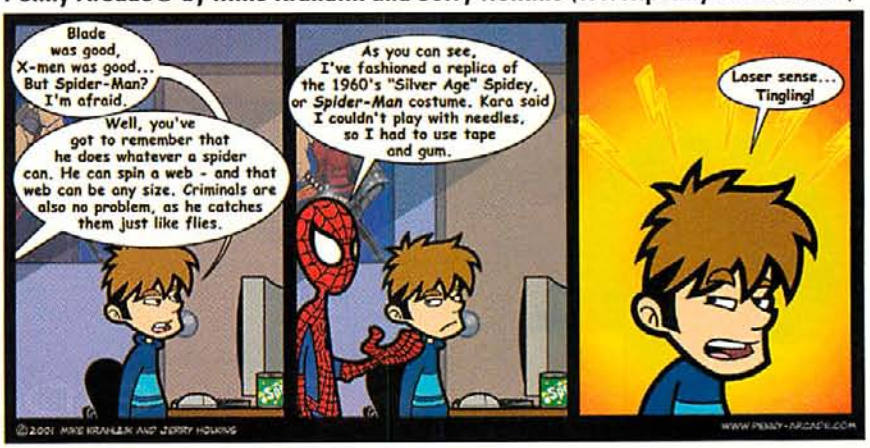
A Parting Shot

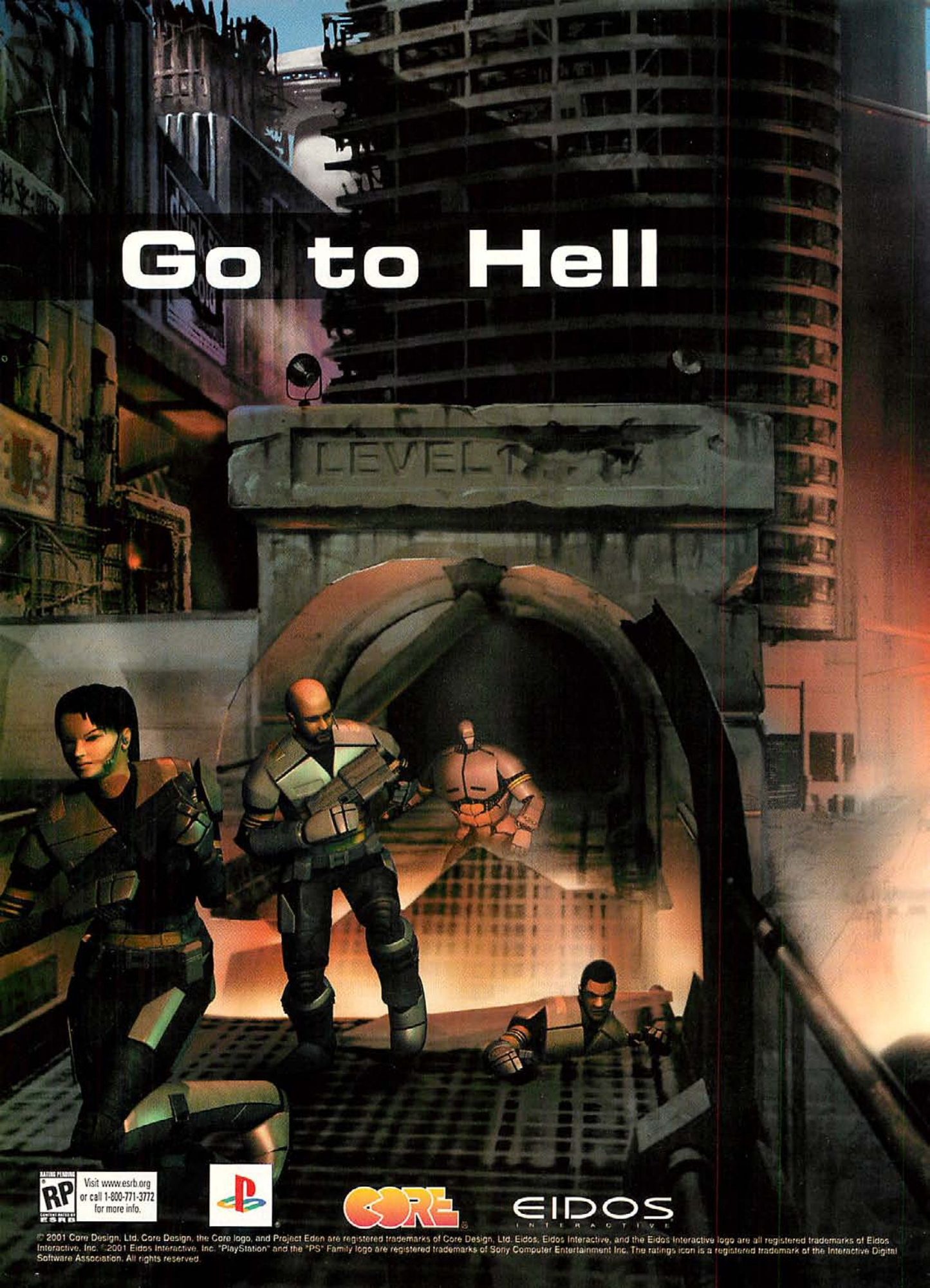
When are you gonna change the picture of George Jones sitting on the toilet? Being a pharmacist, I can recommend a good stool softener.

Dave Moroder

Well, since George has moved on to CGW*'s online department, his bowels have been remarkably relaxed. We credit the Metamucil. Still, let us know about that stool softener. Jeff needs all the help he can get.*

Penny Arcade© by Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins (www.penny-arcade.com)





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Come to Eden

PC CD

PlayStation 2

Due to severe overpopulation, the Earth's diameter is increasing with the growth of towering mega-cities. As civilization climbs high into the sky, it buries below its refuse; criminals, the wretched and the deranged. Now, amidst reports of violence and atrocity in lower levels, a service crew has disappeared without a trace.



Lead a team of specialists into an abyss of vast caverns, snake-like passageways and luring dead-ends.



Tread lightly. The depths belong to twisted cults, mutants and hideous creatures that were never meant to exist.



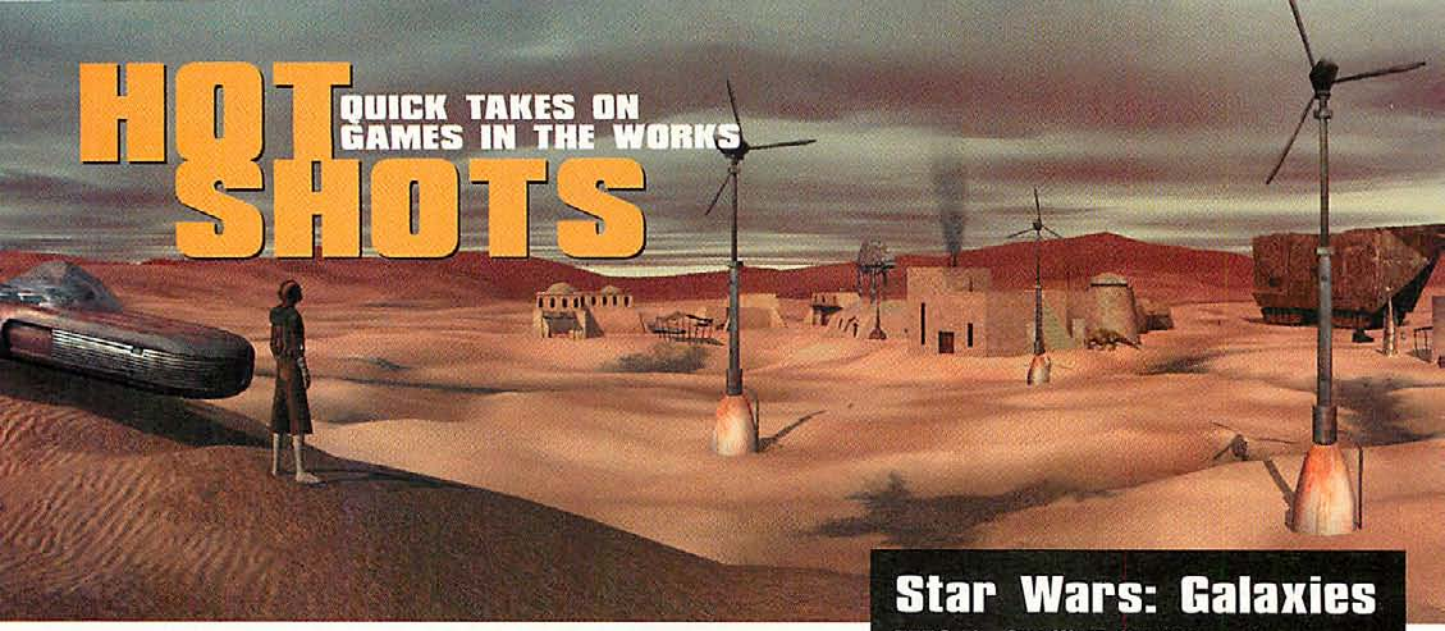
Play in single player mode, or with up to 4 others in multiplayer.

PROJECT EDEN

www.projectedengame.com

HOT SHOTS

QUICK TAKES ON GAMES IN THE WORKS



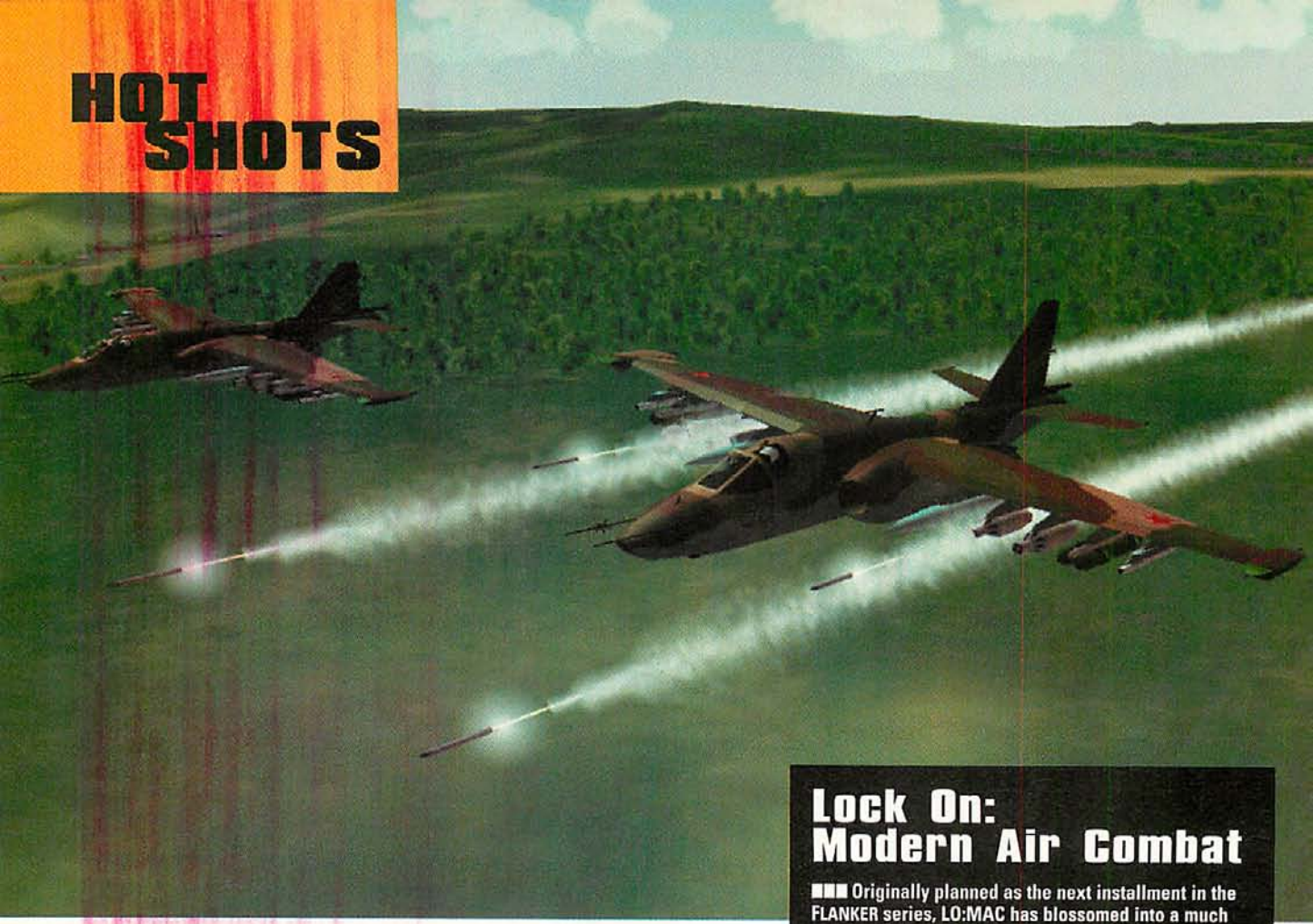
Star Wars: Galaxies

■■■ Seeing STAR WARS: GALAXIES was the unquestioned highlight of E3. It's just too bad we'll have to wait until late 2002 for Sony Online and LucasArts to finish it. Until then, we can stare longingly at unbelievable screenshots like these. For more on the game that reduced all who saw it to grinning, babbling idiots, check out our exhaustive E3 coverage starting on page 54.



Morrowind

■■■ The last ELDER SCROLLS game (DAGGERFALL) had something like 10,000 cities in it. MORROWIND has just 30, but unlike the randomly generated burgs and dungeons of its predecessor, every part of this truly epic RPG is handcrafted—and it shows. Every facet of every civilization has been so thoughtfully considered and realized that when you stumble across a town focused on exploiting giant insects, everything from the largest building to the smallest cup to the enormous lobotomized bugs used as public transportation draws upon that inspiration. They've been working on this one a long time—we'll get to see it late this year.



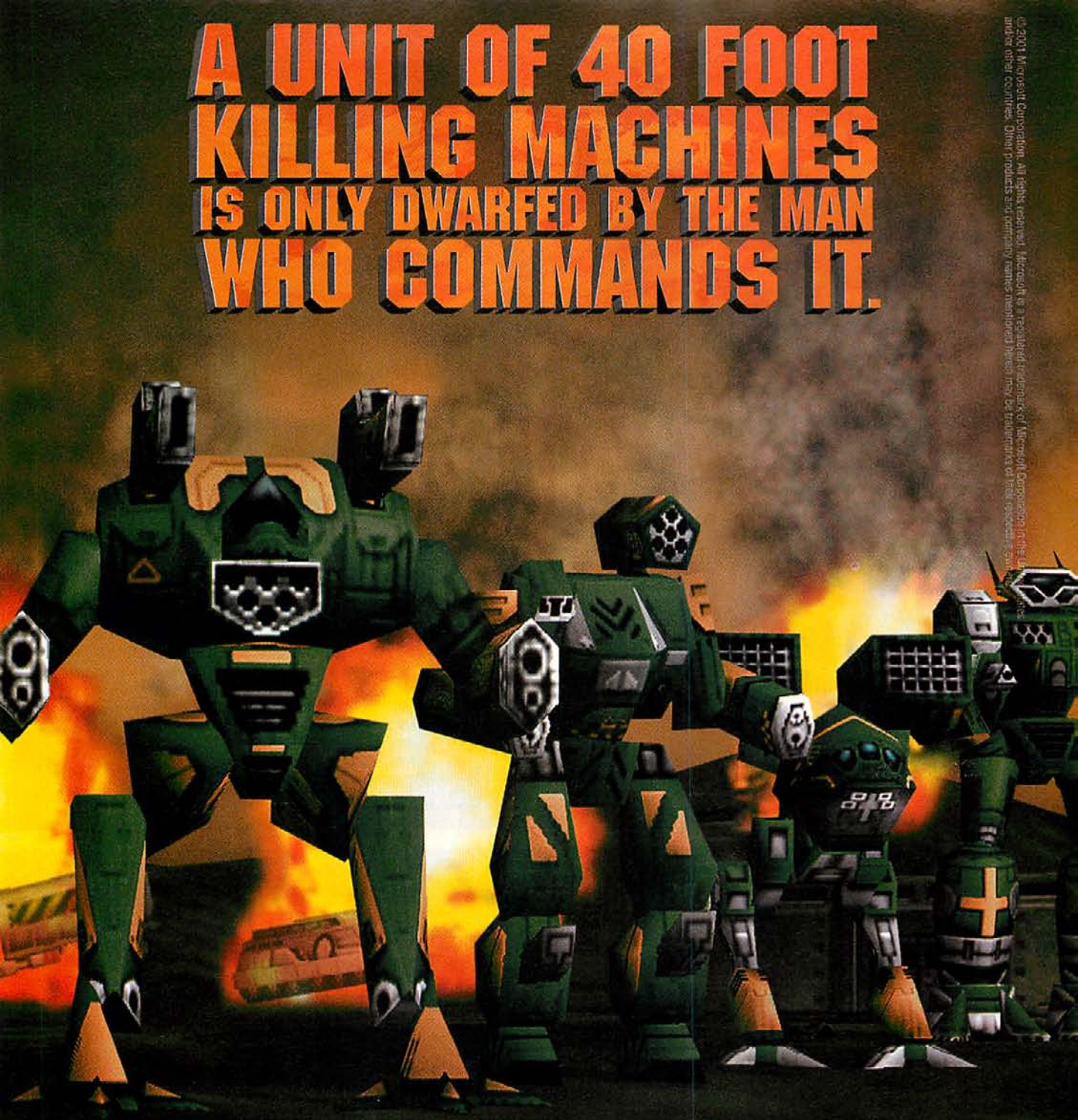
Lock On: Modern Air Combat

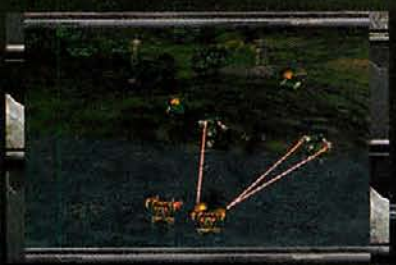
■■■ Originally planned as the next installment in the FLANKER series, LO:MAC has blossomed into a much more ambitious flight sim. Not only will there be far more planes to fly—including the A-10 Warthog and Russia's answer to it, the Su-25 Frogfoot (see above)—and a larger campaign theatre, LO:MAC will take place over a fully interactive and dynamic ground war. Who says sims are dead?



A UNIT OF 40 FOOT KILLING MACHINES IS ONLY DWARFED BY THE MAN WHO COMMANDS IT.

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COMMANDER, YOUR MISSION IS SIMPLE: DISPATCH A COMPANY OF MECHWARRIORS INTO BATTLE TO DESTROY THE ENEMY. THEN SALVAGE THE REPAIRABLE 'MECHS AND USE THEM TO BOLSTER YOUR FUTURE ATTACKS. STAY FOCUSED ON YOUR STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE AND TACTICAL SKILLS THAT GUARANTEE A VICTORIOUS CAMPAIGN. AND REMEMBER, IF YOU CAN SHIFT THE BALANCE OF POWER AND CHANGE HISTORY, THEN YOU WILL TRULY BE A GREAT COMMANDER.



MECH COMMANDER 2

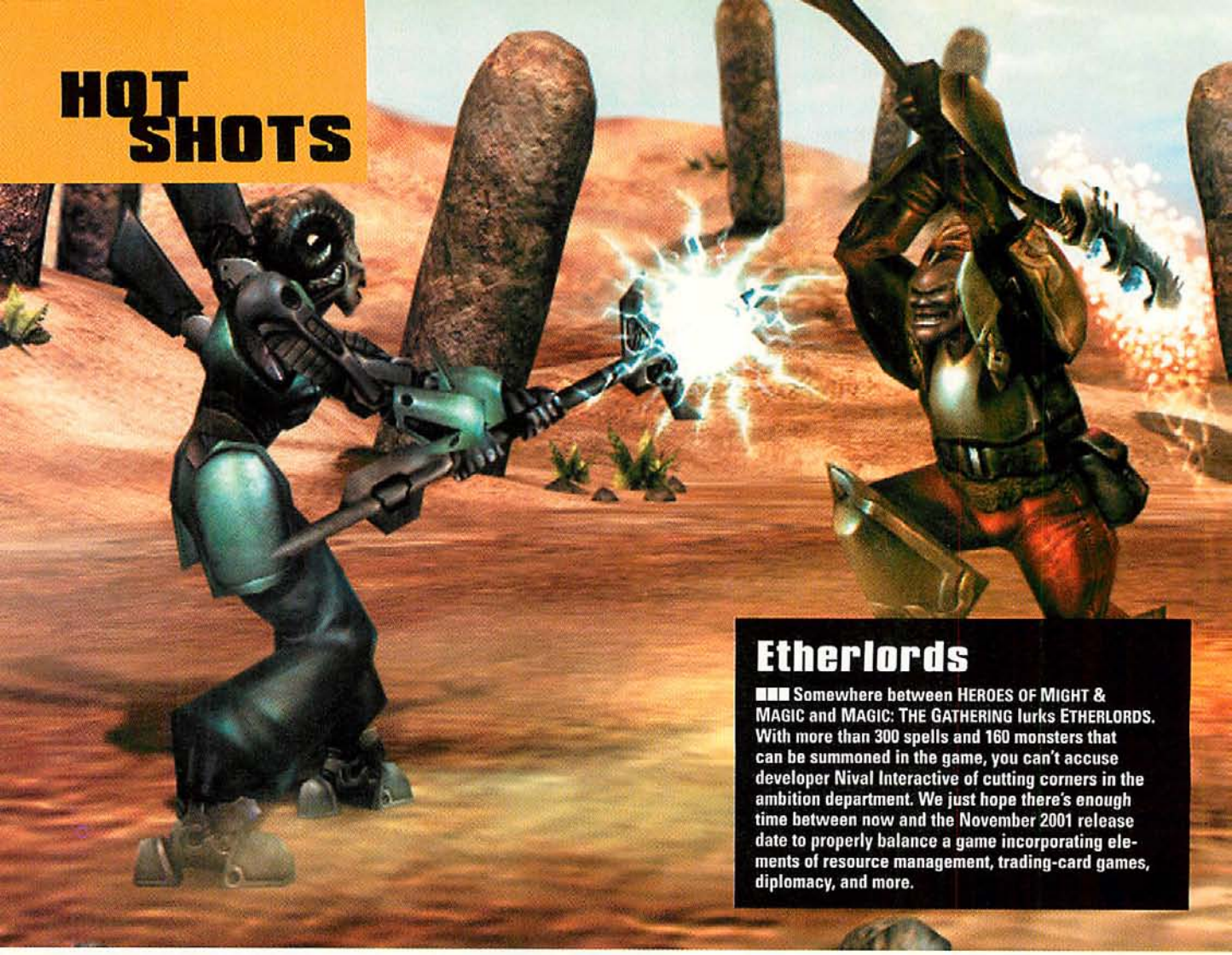
THE MECHWARRIOR® GAME OF TACTICAL COMMAND

microsoft.com/games/mechcommander2

TEEN T VIOLENCE ESRB

Microsoft

HOT SHOTS



Etherlords

■■■ Somewhere between HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC and MAGIC: THE GATHERING lurks ETHERLORDS. With more than 300 spells and 160 monsters that can be summoned in the game, you can't accuse developer Nival Interactive of cutting corners in the ambition department. We just hope there's enough time between now and the November 2001 release date to properly balance a game incorporating elements of resource management, trading-card games, diplomacy, and more.



MechCommander 2

■■■ Odds are you already know all about this game from our exhaustive previews over the last few months. This is just to say: It's in the home stretch and should be out when you read this. It's butt-simple enough for synaptically challenged half-wits like Scooter to pick up and play, and it's visceral enough in its action to keep Scooter interested. Yet, it still has the tactical depth you expect from a game with hard rules set in the Battletech universe. Look at the pretty 'mechs shooting at each other, and go get this game.

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Inside
Low-Tech Mechs
Top 10 Free Online Games
EMPIRE OF THE ANTS

Growing Pains

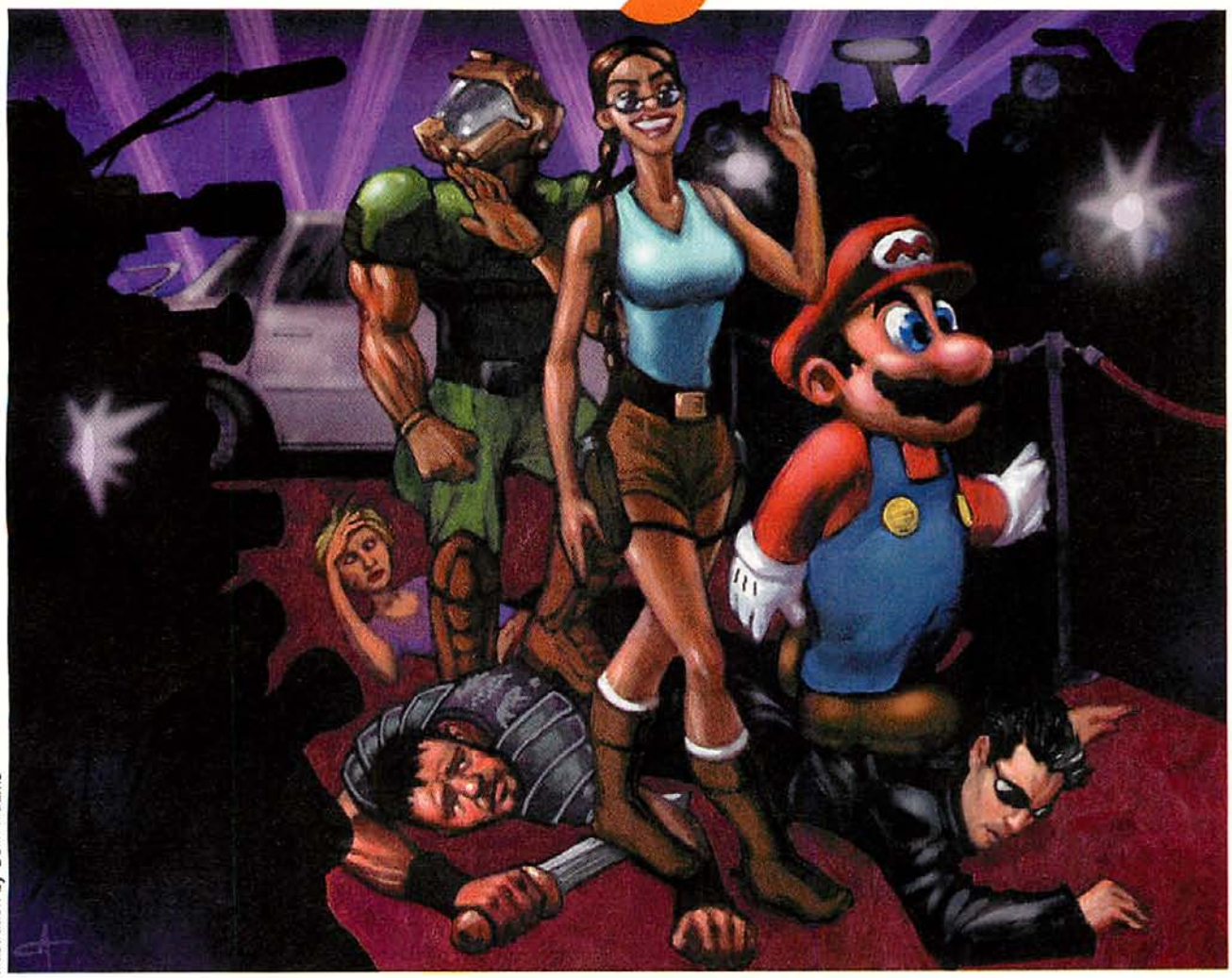


Illustration by Colin Adams

As games challenge other forms of entertainment, the industry struggles for validation

Gaming is finally growing up. It's been almost 30 years since PONG's debut, and almost 20 years since the arrival of the Atari 2600, yet it seems that interactive entertainment is only now entering its adolescence. While gaming is expected to grow faster in the coming years than traditional forms of entertainment, and while trade groups point to its rising popularity, the games industry continues to struggle with the perception that it's juvenile, sexist, and way too geeky for prime time.

Unnoticed amidst the hype and hoopla of the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) was a new survey claiming that interactive entertainment is now the most popular entertainment activity in the United States, surpassing even movies and television. According to the survey, produced by IDC research, 34 percent of Americans say playing computer and video games is the most fun entertainment activity, compared with 16 percent who say watching TV, 13 percent who say surfing the Internet, and 12 percent who say going to the movies is the most fun. Moreover, 57 percent of those who play games most frequently report that games are more fun than any other entertainment activity, with TV coming in a distant second at 13 percent.

This may come as something of a surprise to film directors, whose average budget is often greater than a game company's yearly revenue. It also may come as a surprise to big media like *Entertainment Weekly*, but it's hard to tell since they didn't bother to return our calls. Obviously, they're running scared now that they realize gaming magazines are the new kings of entertainment media.

Despite the gulf between the IDC study and public perception, financial analysts are frothing at the prospects of an industry expected to enjoy faster growth than movies, music, or broadcast television. One such analyst, Justin Post of Deutsche Banc Alex Brown, gushes, "We believe growth for interactive entertainment software sales will outpace revenue growth for any other entertainment media. The key difference versus traditional media is that interactive entertainment is still a relatively young industry."

Overheard

Observations from around the gaming world

"I want to make the *Friends* of computer games."
—Alex Garden, president of Relic Entertainment

"I firmly believe that we're one huge game away from a revolution in online gaming."
—Peter Molyneux, designer of BLACK & WHITE, during a conference on the future of gaming at E3

"Oh my god!" —Anonymous games journalist, upon seeing the demo of STAR WARS: GALAXIES at E3

"We're planning for a million." —Will Wright, on the capacity of THE SIMS ONLINE

"For investors, for businesses, and even for national economies, video games aren't child's play. They are becoming a dominant medium."
—Ted Fishman, *Worth* magazine

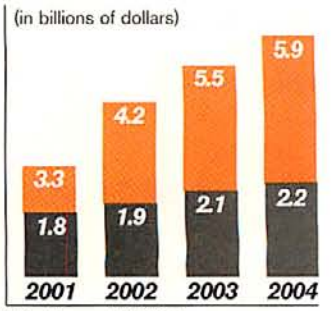
"Microsoft was finished before it even got started. They have no games. Microsoft does not understand the entertainment business."
—Ken Kutaragi, president of Sony Computer Entertainment, condemning the Xbox in an interview with the *Financial Times*

"For Sony to react in such a way means we must be doing something right. Kutaragi may wish it was over, but we've only just begun."
—Richard Teversham of Microsoft U.K., quoted on Computer and Video Games Online.

"By developing [VIRTUAL PORNSTAR: BUNNY LUV] for the Xbox or, as we at Pixis like to call it, the SEXbox, we've transformed the most powerful game machine into the most powerful sex machine. It combines two of the most compelling subjects that will keep hardcore gamers hooked—sex and games." —Mark Media, vice president of adult video firm Pixis, quoted on Adult Video News

"It's the dearth of women, among other things, that consigns games to their geek ghetto, with no genuine celebrities or pop-cult recognition outside [a] narrow subculture. So at E3, you're treated to the sight of hot young developers swaggering across the floor, tricked out in pimp-daddy raiment and boy-band hair, whose only groupies are mouth-breathing dudes in Akira T-shirts."
—Wagner James Au, *Salon*

Estimated Worldwide Gaming Software Sales



Source: Deutsche Banc Alex Brown, TRSTS data, and PC Data

Growing Pains

Continued from page 25

"A relatively young industry" is an apt definition in more ways than one. While designers and suits at E3 struggled with the challenge of reaching the mass market, gaping fanboys shot footage of busty booth babes and midgets launched T-shirts at the crowd in the G.O.D. Lot using a six-foot slingshot worthy of Wile E. Coyote. The contrast was clear to Wagner James Au, who wrote in a *Salon* article after the show, "E3 is proof that the industry is still flailing about for respect....The hypesters can try all they want to market gaming as a cultural force destined to overtake Hollywood, but the industry's dogged unwillingness (or inability) to join the mainstream is about as obvious as a too-big silicone tit stuffed into a too-small T-shirt. This year's E3 was a snapshot of an industry stuck in the geek ghetto, with little hope of breaking out."

Despite Au's dim outlook, gaming may yet break out, and the so-called hypesters may yet prove prescient. A growing number of gamers are—surprise!—women. According to new research from the Interactive Digital Software Association, 39 percent of the people who use the PC to play games most frequently are women, and 26 percent of the most frequent console gamers are women. And although the perception remains that most gamers are kids, 70 percent of the most frequent PC gamers are 18 and over, while 40 percent of PC gamers are over 35, according to the study. Playing games has become the most common use of the PC in the home, IDSA claims, with email coming in a distant second.

Whether you side with the hypesters or the detractors, there's little doubt that gaming is poised for growth in the years ahead (see charts, this page). The console war will spur competition and lead to better games, while GeForce3 graphics chips and broadband penetration will bring gaming experiences of staggering dimensions, like STAR WARS: GALAXIES (see page 56). In the next five years our hobby will undergo tumultuous change, rapid growth, and more than a few growing pains. But at the end of that period we'll have better platforms, higher-quality games, stronger companies, and—one hopes—the maturity and respect to go with them.
—*Ken Brown*

Estimated 2004 U.S. Market Size: Interactive Software vs. Other Media

Source: Veronis Suhler Communications and Deutsche Banc Alex Brown



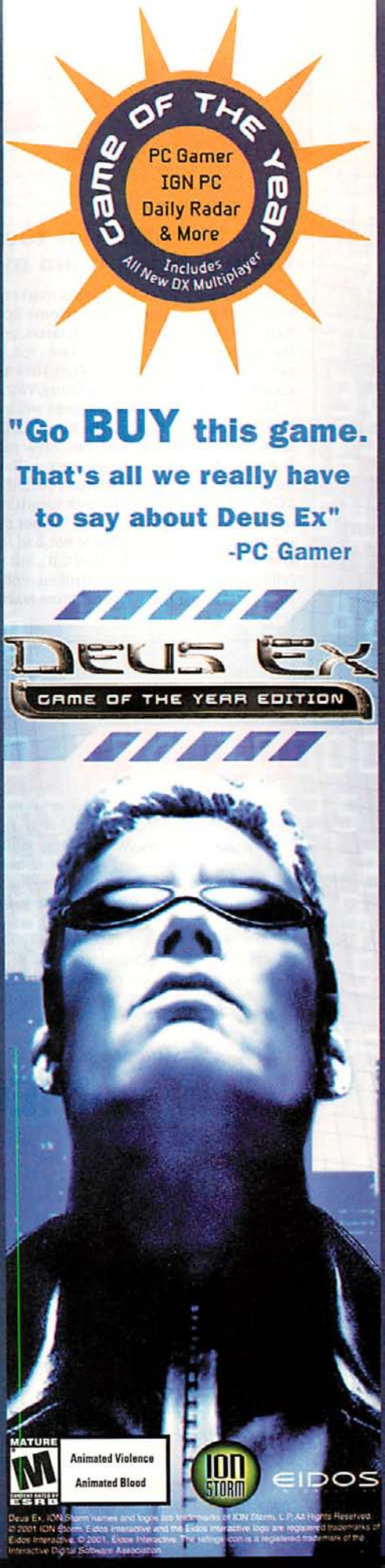


GAME WALLPAPERS

If you're still looking at a Windows logo, you are one big loser. Especially when there are amazing gaming backgrounds like these that you can download free. GameWallpapers.com (**www.gamewallpapers.com**) has a collection of more than 200 PC and PlayStation background styles, available in four resolutions: 800x600, 1024x768, 1152x864, and 1280x1024.

The site is run from the Netherlands, but webmaster Nico Zweers gets access to high-resolution images before games even ship. These images are so high quality they look suitable for framing. You'll find backgrounds for COUNTER-STRIKE, UNREAL II, NO ONE LIVES FOREVER, ONI, DIABLO II, the *Final Fantasy* and *Tomb Raider* movies, and more. Beware the images for DEAD OR ALIVE 2—they'll make a man insane.



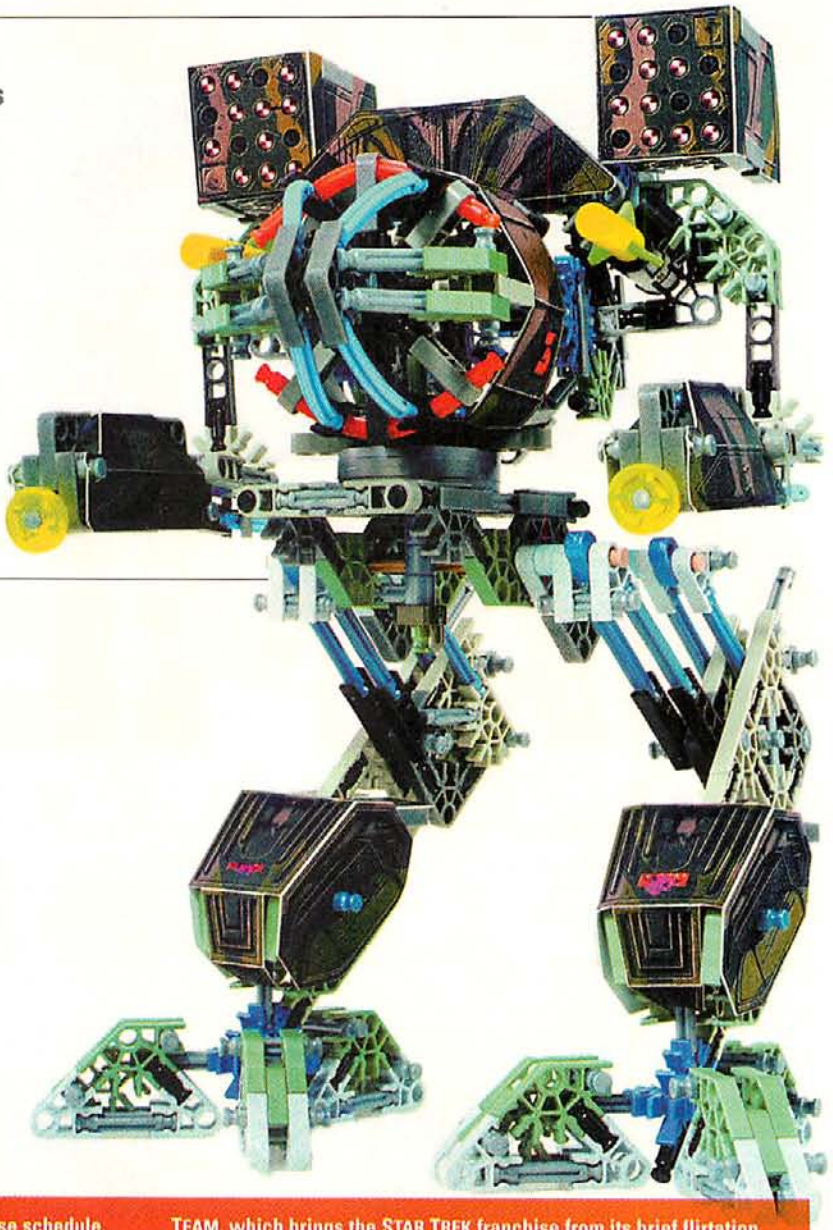


LOW-TECH MECH

New MechWarrior toys feature firing foam missiles

You wanted games to go mass market? Now look what you've done. The fearsome 80-ton battlemechs that belch rockets, lasers, and exploding machine-gun rounds have been reduced to 14-inch-tall plastic kids' toys. Well, they are a lot cooler than a talking cowboy (sorry, Woody).

This fall K'NEX (**www.knex.com**) will introduce three battlemech models: the Mad Cat, Cauldron Born, and Shadow Cat. Each has a few moveable features and a two-inch foam rocket that can be fired about 20 feet (rigorously tested by CGW Labs). The minimechs look surprisingly authentic, although the touted "armor panels" are actually just paper. They're not bad for twenty bucks ($30 for the Mad Cat), but we're holding out for a remote-controlled replica that fires darts and a Taser. The cat must learn to respect the Clan.



Mech TV

A new MechWarrior TV series is in the works from the company that does the visual effects for Voyager. The MechWarrior show will feature computer-generated effects similar to those in shows such as *Roughnecks: The Starship Trooper Chronicles* and *Max Steel*. The series will chronicle the lives of two intergalactic princes as they work together to repel the return of banished marauders. Show times and station information are not yet available; visit **www.Foundation-I.com** for more information.

REALITY CHECK

Strategy and action titles dominated the summer release schedule. Based on the GameRankings.com consensus grade, the top-rated titles this month are BLACK & WHITE, KOHAN, SERIOUS SAM, and interestingly, TRIBES 2. The whipping boy this month is STAR TREK: AWAY TEAM, which brings the STAR TREK franchise from its brief flirtation with coolness right back to mediocrity. Let's hope BRIDGE COMMANDER can help restore the TREK games' lost respect.

	CGW	PC Gamer	CGM	Gamespot	Adrenaline Vault	GameRankings.com
Black & White	A+	A+	C	A	B+	A-
Evil Islands	B-	B	D	B-	*	B
Fallout Tactics	A	A-	B-	B+	*	B+
Fate of the Dragon	C-	C	D	B-	*	B-
High Heat 2002	B+	A-	B-	B	*	B+
Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns	B+	A-	A+	A-	*	A-
Serious Sam	A	B	B+	A-	B+	A-
Sims: House Party	A	B-	B-	B+	A	B
Star Trek: Away Team	C-	D+	D	C	C	C+
Tribes 2	D	A-	*	A-	*	A-

* *no rating available at press time*

Lineage The Blood Pledge

A pledge in blood is never to be broken, unless the body has spilt the last of its blood.



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RP
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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TOP 10 Free Online Games

Need something to do while you're between obsessions? Here are some good time-wasters that won't take over your life.



Atomica - zone.msn.com/atomica

You'll find this addictive puzzle game here and there on the Web, but Zone.com is the best place to get your fix. Place like-colored "atoms" in groups of four or six to clear them from the board.



Blix - www.shockwave.com

One of the few puzzle games endowed with the hypnotic qualities of TETRIS, BLIX tasks players with guiding several bouncing balls into a central cup. Human brains should not be allowed to think this fast.



The Eternal City - www.eternal-city.com

Perhaps the consummate multiuser dungeon (MUD), but don't tell that to all those THRESHOLD fans (www.threshold-rpg.com).



InkLink - www.shockwave.com

If you can find a group of non-idiots to play with, this variant of *Pictionary* is a blast. Who knew the mouse would become the great equalizer of artists?



Poppit - www.excite.com/games

Excite Games' most popular attraction by far, with upwards of 10,000 addicts jacked in at any given time. Pop the balloons to rack up points and win prizes.



Psychobabble - popcap.com/psychobabble.html

Not even an infinite number of monkeys typing at random could come up with some of the lines players cobble together in PSYCHOBABBLE.



SabreWing - www.sabrewing3d.com

Like having WING COMMANDER in your Web browser. Amazing graphics, full joystick support, and you don't even need a broadband connection to enjoy it.



SiSSYFiGHT 2000 - www.sissyfight.com

This one may be ancient in Web years, but it hasn't lost any of its vicious edge. You'd better play nice or we'll tell!



The Random Game - therandomgame.com

The distilled essence of every game you've ever played. Just try to stop clicking once you've seen the high and low scores. Now where's the strategy guide?



Word Racer - games.yahoo.com

Connect adjacent letters to form words before the other folks in the room can.

—Tracy Baker

On the Radar



Blizzard's Next Big Thing

Blizzard says it's working on a secret project that will be announced at ECTS in early September. The company won't say what the game is, only what it's not—it's not STARCRAFT 2. Blizzard wouldn't comment on speculation that it's a massively multiplayer online game based on either WARCRAFT or STARCRAFT.

Richard Garriott's Next Destination

Richard Garriott, creator of the legendary ULTIMA and ULTIMA ONLINE role-playing games, has partnered with Korean game company NCsoft. NCsoft runs LINEAGE: THE BLOOD PLEDGE, the largest subscription-based online game in the world, with more than two million accounts in Korea. Garriott will work with ULTIMA ONLINE cocreator Starr Long and LINEAGE creator Jake Song on launching new online games in North America and Asia. In addition, Garriott's studio, Destination Games, will work with NCsoft and NC Interactive to improve support and visibility for LINEAGE in the North American market.

EVERQUEST Goes Multilingual

The upcoming EVERQUEST: SHADOWS OF LUCLIN expansion will feature real-time text translation between English, French, German, Japanese, and Korean. When players type in text, it will be automatically translated to the language of the other users. Once Sony works the kinks out, it plans to include the same feature in PLANETSIDE, STAR WARS: GALAXIES, and SOVEREIGN.

Crouching Tiger Games

UbiSoft has acquired the license from Sony Pictures for *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the martial arts sensation that garnered 10 Oscar nominations and four awards last year, including Best Foreign Language Film. UbiSoft will develop and publish *Crouching Tiger* games for the PlayStation2, PC, GameCube, Game Boy Advance, and Xbox, with spring 2002 release dates.

Interplay at Play

Pacific Century Cyberworks is rumored to be in talks to acquire Interplay Productions. The Japanese company acquired VR1 Entertainment in April, and is now looking to take over the publisher of BALDUR'S GATE II and THE MATRIX, according to an anonymous source involved in the negotiations. The source says Pacific Century plans to "aggressively grow its video-game business" in the years ahead.

Origin Shuts Down Volunteer Program

Origin Systems has shut down its ULTIMA ONLINE volunteer program, which assisted players and helped develop quests for the game. Many volunteers think the move is a direct result of the pending class-action lawsuit filed against parent company Electronic Arts by several former UO volunteers, who are claiming that they were really "part-time employees" and are due compensation. Nearly 100 former volunteers have since formed guilds on the UO shards and continue to train new players and assist players in need, using their own accounts.

The Ants Are Coming!

"Ground control" takes on new meaning in EMPIRE OF THE ANTS

We've been battling bugs for so long it's a wonder there aren't more games about bugs. There have been a few critter sims, like SIMANT and BADMOJO, but there's never been a game quite like this. EMPIRE OF THE ANTS takes you inside the anthill for a 3D view of the action, giving you control over the colony. It's a pretty refreshing concept for the blood-soaked real-time strategy genre: Focus on the activities of a bunch of miniscule marauders.

Developed in France by the painful-sounding Microids, EMPIRE OF THE ANTS has already been released in Europe and is coming to our shores soon. The game gives you an overhead perspective as you gather food, manage resources, battle predators, and build an anthill that can stand the test of time. The queen, of course, is the most important unit, since she handles all unit production. There are nurseries for eggs, food storage areas, and a labyrinth of tunnels and passages. Outside, the world is crawling with predators, including beetles, wasps, praying mantises, and other ants. Players will have to venture out to acquire food and building materials to support the colony.

The game reportedly models more than 60 different insect and other animal species. Hopefully, it won't include bugs of the digital kind when it ships later this year. Until then, you can play the English demo of EMPIRE OF THE ANTS, downloadable from **www.omnitask.com/ants_uk_demo.exe** (115.7MB). For more details, visit **www.microids.com/english/Gamesants.html**.





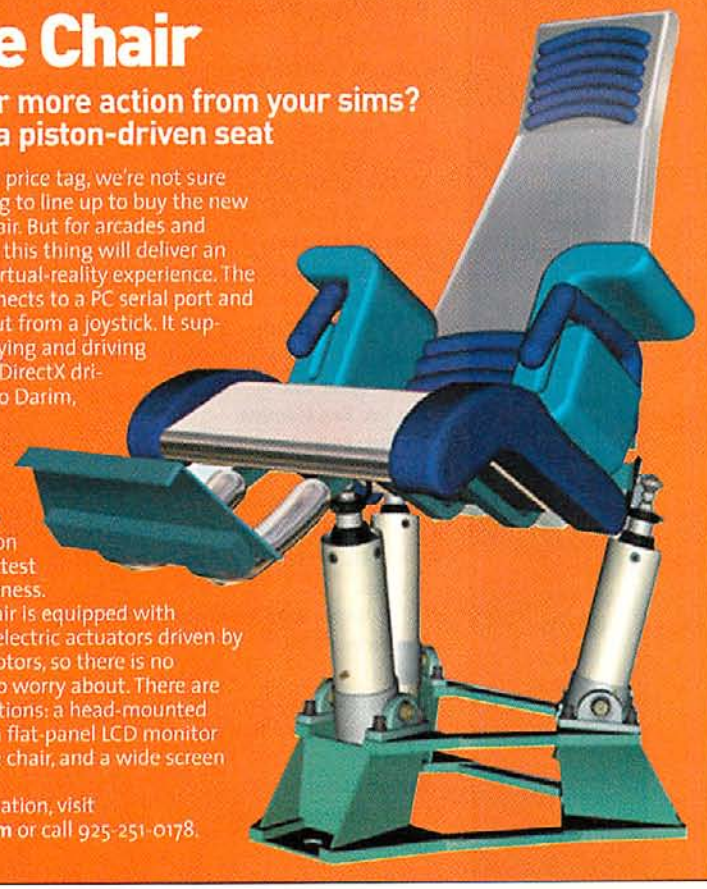
Battle Chair

Looking for more action from your sims? Strap into a piston-driven seat

With its $10,000 price tag, we're not sure gamers are going to line up to buy the new Darim Cobra Chair. But for arcades and training centers, this thing will deliver an action-packed virtual-reality experience. The Cobra Chair connects to a PC serial port and responds to input from a joystick. It supports most PC flying and driving games that use DirectX drivers, according to Darim, and has three degrees of motion—for pitch, heave, and roll. We saw the chair in action at E3, and can attest to its responsiveness.

The Cobra Chair is equipped with three powerful electric actuators driven by brushless DC motors, so there is no hydraulic fluid to worry about. There are three display options: a head-mounted display, a 17-inch flat-panel LCD monitor mounted on the chair, and a wide screen or projector.

For more information, visit **www.vrchair.com** or call 925-251-0178.



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PIPELINE

Predicting software release dates is like trying to figure out who's going to get clipped on *The Sopranos*. These dates represent the best available information at press time. If you're a publisher, send your updates to: cgwletters@ziffdavis.com.

Updates



HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2: It's using an all-new engine, and the team is taking time to polish it up and make sure it's not as buggy as before. Look for more info in our E3 feature, this issue.

MEDAL OF HONOR: Still don't believe it's a title to watch? Here's another screen to show you its raw, war-torn beauty.



RAILS ACROSS AMERICA: With a time span from 1830 to 2020, the game will focus on the big picture, as opposed to the individualized railcars of RAILROAD TYCOON II. Lay down and manage route empires, engage in diplomacy with rival rail companies, and partake in route auctions reminiscent of M.U.L.E. Keep an eye out for this wry little train strategy game from Strategy First.

STAR TREK: BRIDGE COMMANDER: The big news from E3: No multiplayer. We were disappointed to hear that, but the variety of combat and command challenges still piques our interest.



TRAIN SIMULATOR: This just in: The game has gone gold. Will piloting trains be interesting enough, or will gamers need to start crashing to get fun out of this title? We'll let you know in our next issue.

Age of Mythology Ensemble	Spring 2002
Age of Wonders II: The Wizard's Throne G.O.D.	Spring 2002
Aliens vs. Predator 2 Monolith	Winter 2001
Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare Infogrames	Summer 2001
Anachronox Eidos	July 2001
Arcanum Sierra	September 2001
Aquanox Fishtank Interactive	Fall 2001
Asheron's Call 2 Microsoft	Winter 2001
Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal Interplay	Fall 2001
Battle Realms Crave Entertainment	Summer 2001
Black Isle Studios: TORN Interplay	Winter 2001
UPDATE Combat Mission 2 Big Time Software	Fall 2001
Command & Conquer: Renegade Westwood	Summer 2001
Commandos 2 Eidos	August 2001
NEW Counter-Strike: Condition Zero Sierra	Fall 2001
Dark Sector Digital Extremes	Winter 2001
Deus Ex 2 Eidos	Summer 2002
Diablo II: Lord Of Destruction Blizzard	Summer 2001
NEW Disciples II: Dark Prophecy Strategy First	October 2001
Dragon's Lair 3D Blue Byte	Summer 2001
Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	Fall 2001
Dungeon Siege Microsoft	September 2001
Earth & Beyond Westwood	Winter 2001
UPDATE Elder Scrolls: Morrowind Bethesda	Fall 2002
Empire Earth Sierra	Fall 2001
NEW Etherlords Strategy First	November 2001
EverQuest: Shadows of Luclin Verant	Fall 2001
Flight Simulator 2002 Microsoft	Fall 2001
Freedom Force Crave	Winter 2001
Galactic Commander Online 3000AD	Summer 2001
UPDATE Global Operations Crave	Winter 2001
Halo Microsoft	Spring 2002
Heroes of Might & Magic IV 3DO	Fall 2001
UPDATE Hidden & Dangerous 2 G.O.D.	Winter 2001
Independence War 2 Infogrames	Summer 2001
NEW Master of Orion 3 Infogrames	Spring 2002
Medal of Honor Allied Assault Electronic Arts	Fall 2001
Motor City Online Electronic Arts	Fall 2001
NEW Myth III: The Wolf Age G.O.D.	Winter 2001
Neverwinter Nights Interplay	Winter 2001
NEW Nexagon: The Pit Strategy First	Spring 2002
UPDATE O.R.B. Strategy First	November 2001
NEW Operation Flashpoint Codemasters	September 2001
UPDATE PlanetSide Verant	Summer 2002
Pool of Radiance II UbiSoft	Summer 2001
Project Eden Eidos	Summer 2001
NEW Rails Across America Strategy First	September 2001
Red Faction THQ	Fall 2001
Return to Wolfenstein Activision	Fall 2001
NEW Rogue Spear: Black Thorn UbiSoft	Fall 2001
Sid Meier's Civilization III Infogrames	August 2001
NEW Sid Meier's SimGolf Electronic Arts	Fall 2001
Sigma: The Adventures of Rex Chance Microsoft	Fall 2001
UPDATE Simsville Electronic Arts	Spring 2002
NEW Sims Online Electronic Arts	Summer 2002
NEW Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix Activision	Winter 2001
Sovereign Sony Online Entertainment	Summer 2002
NEW Spider-Man Activision	Summer 2001
Star Trek: Borg Assimilator Activision	Winter 2001
Star Trek: Bridge Commander Activision	Summer 2001
Star Wars: Galactic Battleground LucasArts	Fall 2001
UPDATE Star Wars: Galaxies LucasArts	Spring 2003
NEW Star Wars Jedi Outcast: Jedi Knight II LucasArts	Spring 2002
NEW Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic LucasArts	Fall 2002
Stronghold G.O.D.	October 2001
UPDATE Sudden Strike Forever Strategy First	August 2001
Team Fortress 2 Sierra	Fall 2002
Thief III Eidos	Summer 2002
Throne of Darkness Sierra	Summer 2001
UPDATE Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon UbiSoft	Spring 2002
Unreal II Infogrames	Spring 2002
WarCraft III Blizzard	Spring 2002
UPDATE Warlords IV UbiSoft	Winter 2001
Zoo Tycoon Microsoft	Fall 2001

Infogrames and Spellbound Present

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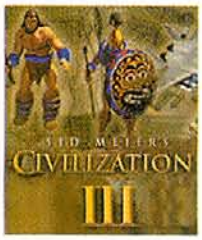
Spellbound

INFOGRAMES

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THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 PREORDERS



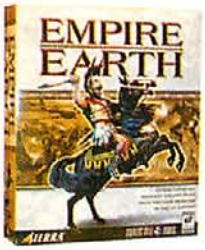
Civilization 3 *(INFOGRAMES)*
A whole new dimension of strategy and possibility that was absent in past Civilization games is created by integrating the concept of culture into the Civilization universe. Brute military force is no longer the only option you have for conquering enemy civilizations.



Dungeon Siege *(MICROSOFT)*
Plunge into a continuous 3-D fantasy world on a quest to stop a mysterious evil that has been unleashed. This is an action fantasy role-playing game that combines the immersive elements of a role-playing game with the intensity of a real-time strategy game.



Arcanum: Of Steamworks & Magick Obscura
(SIERRA STUDIOS) Welcome to the land of Arcanum, where magic and sorcery hold equal sway with technology and science. An adventurer among dwarves, humans, orcs, and elves might just as easily wield a flintlock pistol as a flaming sword.

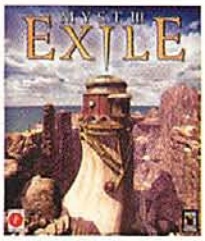


Empire Earth *(SIERRA STUDIOS)*
This game promises to be the premier historical real-time strategy game, as accessible as Age of Empires, but with far more excitement and depth, offering players unprecedented freedom to customize both the historical scope of their game and the character of their civilizations.



Commandos 2 *(EIDOS)*
A tactical action-strategy game set against a World War II backdrop. Take control of an elite group of gritty soldiers who must venture deep into enemy territory and utilize their combined expertise to complete a series of mission-based objectives.

THIS MONTH'S TOP 5 RELEASES



Myst III: Exile *(UBISOFT)*
Building on the surreal style of Myst and Riven, Myst III: Exile features new fantastic environments that made its' predecessors immersive, mysterious and beautiful. Exile features five entirely new ages for players to explore and hours of new mysteries to uncover.



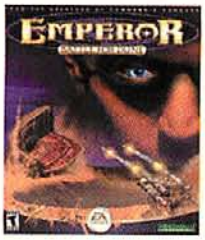
Train Simulator *(MICROSOFT)*
Play as engineer or passenger. This game delivers one of the most realistic experiences to date. Contains six routes and over 600 miles of rail that was recreated using extensive data on terrain and elevation. Trackside details are nearly identical to their real-life counterpart.



Diablo II Expansion: Lord of Destruction *(BLIZZARD)* You will face a new series of quests and challenges to prevent Baal, the last of the Prime Evils, and his vile minions from destroying the world of Sanctuary by corrupting the Worldstone, which protects the whole mortal plane from the forces of Hell.



Baldur's Gate II Expansion: Throne of Bhaal *(INTERPLAY)*
Continue the epic saga of Baldur's Gate™ II to its ultimate conclusion as you fulfill your destiny as the child of Bhaal. Unravel the mysteries of Watcher's Keep, cast new high level spells and gain powerful new abilities.



Emperor Battle for Dune
(EA GAMES) Battles between the original factions–the sinister Ordos, the evil Harkonnen, and the noble Atreides– will rage over three different planets until the final battles on Arrakis, also known as Dune. Expect this fully 3-D strategy game to reinvent the RTS genre.

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TOP 20

Top-Selling PC Games From April



The Sims: House Party (Electronic Arts) $26 ★★★★★

SIMS games topped the charts this month, with three titles in the top five. It's not as if HOUSE PARTY is the best game on the market; it's that half the people who bought THE SIMS are getting add-ons, and this is the latest one out.

Black & White (Electronic Arts) $41 ★★★★½



The debate over this game has subsided, without consensus. Some are enthralled with the design, some are appalled with the tedium. It's not for everyone—if you already have kids, the novelty of raising a big monkey may wear off pretty quickly.

The Sims (Electronic Arts) $40 ★★★★★



This game has done more to advance PC gaming than anything since TETRIS. Have you seen who's buying it? Housewives, teenage girls.... You think EA cares whether the hardcore like it? They've reached the mass-market, and have become the envy of publishers worldwide.

4	Tribes 2 (Vivendi)	$44	★★★½
5	The Sims: Livin' Large (Electronic Arts)	$27	★★★★½
6	Roller Coaster Tycoon (Infogrames)	$26	★★★★½
7	Sim Theme Park (Electronic Arts)	$20	★★★★½
8	Age of Empires II: Age of Kings (Microsoft)	$42	★★★★½
9	Lego Island 2 (Lego Media)	$24	n/a
10	Diablo 2 (Vivendi)	$38	★★★★½
11	NASCAR Racing 4 (Vivendi)	$42	★★★★½
12	Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2 (Electronic Arts)	$38	★★★★½
13	Frogger JC (Infogrames)	$9	★★★½
14	Hoyle Casino 2001 (Vivendi)	$28	n/a
15	Who Wants To Be A Millionaire JC (Disney)	$10	★★★½
16	Roller Coaster Tycoon: Loopy Landscapes (Infogrames)	$27	★★★★½
17	Serious Sam (G.O.D.)	$19	★★★★½
18	Age of Empires II: Conquerors (Microsoft)	$30	★★★★½
19	SimCity 3000 Unlimited (Electronic Arts)	$36	★★★★½
20	Half-Life: Game Of The Year Edition (Vivendi)	$23	★★★★½

Based on sales figures for April, 2001. Source: NPD INTELECT Market Tracking

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

5 August 1996



From the recurring themes file: This issue's editorial decried a lack of innovation at E3. Johnny Wilson observed that "the hottest games at the show seemed to be merely the games of a decade ago with better graphics and sound." Despite his frustration with the "immaturity of our medium and the lack of creativity in today's games," he predicted that new advances would eventually raise gaming to the level of other entertainment. Here's hoping he'll be proven right.

10 August 1991

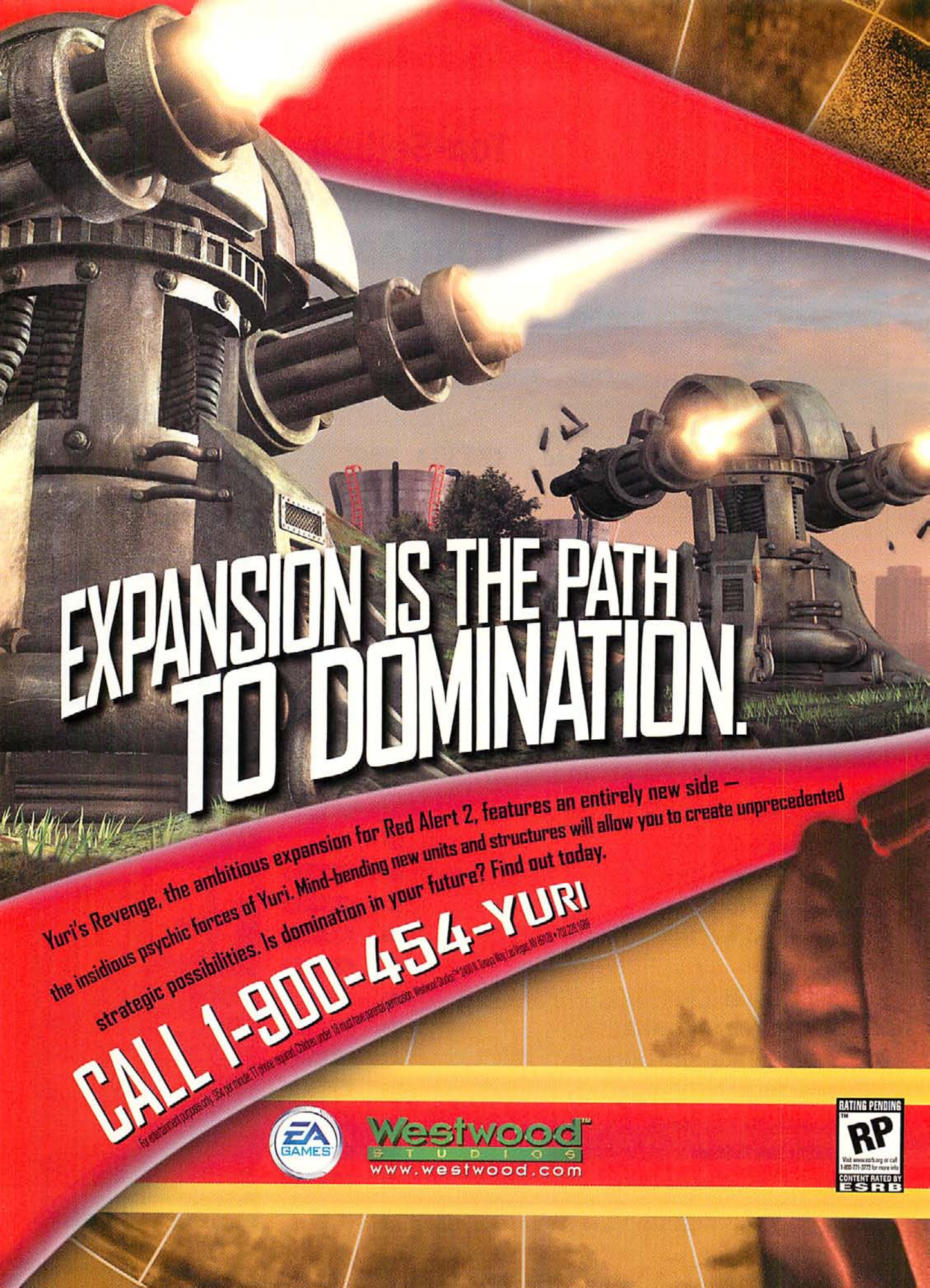


Ten years ago a two-page review had only one screenshot, but in the case of LIFE & DEATH II: THE BRAIN, one was plenty. How many fuzzy gray VGA screenshots of a brain scan do you need? Dr. Jesse Cheng praised the new Sound-Blaster-compatible audio, which could re-create "impressive effects" like the sound of a drill cutting into bone. Now you know why there aren't any more LIFE & DEATH games on the PC.

15 August 1986



Who says we don't cover Mac games? Issue 30 devoted two full pages to Mac versions of PC games. Our resident Mac snob crowed that the Mac version of FLIGHT SIMULATOR displayed real scenery instead of wireframe terrain. In the Industry Update, we couldn't resist a few wisecracks about Avalon Hill's upcoming DR. RUTH'S GAME OF GOOD SEX, speculating that the designer couldn't attend a convention "because he's working on the rules for the solitaire version of GOOD SEX."


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BABES IN BOYLAND

by Holly Fleming

Who can deny the appeal of an outstanding nipple, gleaming tan skin, or hair so blonde it blinds you?

Not I.

And neither can the scores of convention-goers at the annual Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) in Los Angeles.

Every spring, gamers throng the convention hall to experience the latest wares: the games, yes, and the women we call Booth Babes. We traipse by them, mesmerized, attracted (much like babies or animals) to what is bright and shiny.

Booth Babes are hired by the game/hardware companies to be things like "Demonstrators" or "Crowd Gatherers." The company stipulates the wardrobe, dressing them in things like short skirts ("We're freezing in here," said one in a shrunken black dress), dominatrix boots, pit-crew jumpsuits with the zippers artfully unzipped (for pit-crew decolletage), and assless pants. The women are selected from their modeling agency photos; the prototype is usually (but not always) long-haired, long-legged, healthy, and eager to answer questions.

I wanted to know what it's like to work E3, and how it compares to other conventions.

Help Me Rhonda, Yeah

"This show's different from the Health and Fitness Show," said one in vinyl.

Oh? How's that? I asked.

"You can tell these guys are staying indoors a lot."

(Now, that doesn't seem very nice. I think what she meant to say is that they stay indoors with their books, and with their treadmills.)

"And they're not as aggressive as they are at the Alcohol Show," she added. That show holds forth in Las Vegas, by the way, on the tail of the Porn Convention.

I found many of the Booth Babes to be slightly jaded, if perky. Most have worked E3 and many other conventions before, and they nonchalantly perch in their booths and chat with one another (usually two or more are clumped together), nonplussed by the glut of attention. It comes in waves. Every 15 minutes or so, a man (or boy, or man/boy) will sidle up with a camera and want to nestle amongst them for a friendly group shot. His friend will take the picture, and then the two will swap. Some men are "shakers" and others are "grabbers," a Babe told me.

"They want their picture taken with us all the time. It's cute, but I don't know. It's sad." She possessed an understanding far beyond her years. And, she possessed a rack.

"It gets worse the less you have on," said a Babe in beige suede shortie shorts. "They can get a little handsy."

"There's a lot of grunting and staring," another one said. She had a startlingly long brown ponytail. Yesterday, by the bathroom, a man asked her if she was Lara Croft.

"They're not good with the verbal."

A very blonde one—with teeth so white they were light blue—chimed in. "It's like they haven't seen girls before. You're more of a fantasy. They don't really want to talk to you."

"They're easily fascinated," said another. They don't get out much." I was fascinated by her big shiny mouth.

Another Babe piped in. "They're in awe. Some of them are trembling."

Now that's touching.

"One of them asked me for my autograph."

Now that's sick.

Apparently, a lot of men photograph or videotape them without asking, occasionally for "a long time."

"What is he going to do with that picture?" asked a Babe, rhetorically. "Is he going to show it around and say, 'This is my girlfriend in California?'"

I venture to suggest that most of these photos and videotapes will never see the light of day but only the light of a dim and very possibly dank bedroom.

Pet Sounds

Indeed, many of these women seemed a little pissy. One Babe stood out in particular. She had the long blonde hair; she was very stately; her eyes were steady and stunning. There was a quite noticeable flaw, however, which I picked out immediately: Her nose was like a discarded lump of Play-Doh.

"What about these guys who stop right in front of you and fart," she exclaimed forcefully. "A lot of them don't shower. They hug you and their pit is right in your face." I didn't know what to say.

Incidentally, some of these Babes had bad breath.

Listening to many of their anecdotes, I





could understand why some of them—standing for hours on end in stilletos—might be less than ecstatic. They do get fed at E3, which is apparently more than they get at other conventions. They're paid cash money, of course. And, they occasionally get the added bonus of their game-company boss asking them out to lunch, or requesting their presence at the company party after hours. Odd, I didn't see any Babes dressed as geishas.

Many gamers, it seems, are capable of audacious overtures. "They slip you their room key," said one. She had eyes like a cat. "Of course, I give it back immediately."

Said another, who was working at the Comfynet (a maker of kids' games) booth, "A lot of them are wearing their wedding rings on their right hands." Cunning!

There are, apparently, quite a few vocal appeals for the women to disrobe—even more than they already had.

"He said, 'I like your outfit. Come over to my house and you can leave it there.'"

Ah, wit.

There were a flock of Babes holding giant hoops with curtains hanging from them. Men hid in them to change out of their old gaming T-shirts and into brand-new gaming T-shirts, handed to them by their hoop-holding Babe. Whitish, freckled, hairy skin was everywhere. One guy turned to his Babe: "How about you take *your* top off?" he asked, happily.

Can't blame a gamer for trying.

Don't Worry, Baby

"We can't say what we'd really like to say," the Babe with the brunette ponytail told me. She had on a vinyl outfit that seemed inspired by outer space, and stroked a nifty toy gun. "I try to point my gun at them whenever I can." Sassy!

"It's actually very anonymous," said one, who looked like Marilyn Monroe—the least anonymous Babe of all time. I got the feeling, at the end of the day, that the parade of lookers-on, the silent videotaping, the hands, and the come-on lines can get to a girl after a while—especially after eight hours (and then some).

But don't mope. Many Babes spoke out in praise of gamers. I'm here to tell you that they like Asians in particular.

"Asians are polite and they smell good."

But even if you're not Asian, there is hope. "These guys are more creative and fun than at other conventions."

"There's a lot of computer nerds. I don't know. They're cute," she said wistfully.

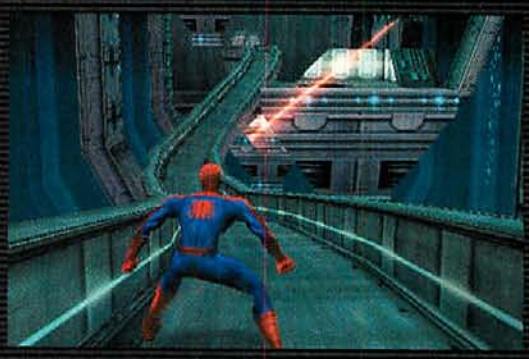
"I'm rarely offended." (Take this particular comment lightly, as this was the same Babe who was asked to take her top off, earlier.). "They're respectful."

"They're so into their stuff..."

See? They think you're cute! And esoteric! My advice, from talking to a downright delectible sampling of Booth Babes, is this:

- Talk to them, and not just "Will you take your top off?" Be eloquent if possible. They like that. Some of them. Maybe 50 percent of them.
- Recognize that they are not geishas, placed at the convention solely for you and your trembling handsiness.
- Use plenty of soap (if you're not already Asian). CGW





Spider-Man

Breaking the superhero curse one web at a time

by Jason Babler

GENRE: Action
RELEASE DATE: Summer 2001
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: LiveSay
CONTACT: www.activision.com

Stan Lee once said that the inherent appeal of SPIDER-MAN is the idea that he's the nerd who makes it against all odds. Despite having everything stacked against him, with a bit of sly wit and webbing he prevails.

And just as he prevails against various villains in the comics and the upcoming film, so shall his game prevail against the dreaded Superhero Game Curse. SPIDER-MAN will take on the curse that cancelled CHAMPIONS and has made most comic-book-based PC games extremely substandard, and most likely, SPIDER-MAN will win.

Pure Comic Genius

If someone had told me a year ago that there was going to be an honest-to-god fun third-person Spider-Man game, I would have gently scoffed. Had they added that it would have great camera control, free-form web slinging, and Spidey's trademark humor, and that it'd be on a PC, I would of said, "Kind sir, surely you jest," or something equally colorful.

But the red-and-blue guy on the left says it all: The game is real, it's coming, and it looks great so far.

I played the PlayStation SPIDER-MAN demo at E3 last year, and I kept asking myself: How am I going to walk on walls and ceilings without losing all sense of direction, and keep from barfing in my Hulk mug in the process? While they're not completely flawless, Activision nailed the PlayStation and Dreamcast versions better than anyone expected. I was hoping that a direct port to PC would retain the camera system, and it seems that it has. Show me a better camera system and I'll pour my big Wisconsin gut into a Spidey suit, hang from a cable in the middle of San Francisco, and shout "My spider-sense is tingling!" till I'm hauled away to jail or a theater group.

The PC version doesn't appear to be much different from the console versions, and this is a very good thing, so don't let the





word "port" scare you off. METAL GEAR SOLID was a great port, and no one can dispute that the game was a blast even two years later on the PC. Now Spidey is slinging his way into the same fluid transition.

Is the gameplay, level design, or puzzle solving groundbreaking? Not really. It still boils down to running around beating guys up. Are the graphics going to blow you away like those in GIANTS or BLACK & WHITE? Nope. Is this the type of game that you—the jaded PC gamer who never touches a console game—might want to play till the end? The odds are good.

The beta reminded me of SERIOUS SAM, in the sense that it's not trying to reinvent the gaming paradigm, but just wants to make sure you have fun. SPIDER-MAN may have the ability to trigger the same brain receptors that respond to the visual pleasure of comics. Some days you feel like sitting back with an Ingmar Bergman film, glass of wine in hand, and other days you just want to pig out on Milk Duds while watching Independence Day, enjoying all that campy fun. You wouldn't want to do it every day, but sometimes it just hits the spot.

Does Whatever a Spider Can

Plucked from the comic-book pages are some of the best Spidey villains, who keep on defying both incarceration and death: Rhino, Dr. Octopus (a Roy Orbison impersonator winner twice over), Scorpion, Mysterio, Venom, Carnage, and...nah, I won't ruin it. There are eight main locations, with 30 subsection levels that range from rooftops to sewers, laboratories, and even The Daily Bugle's press room.

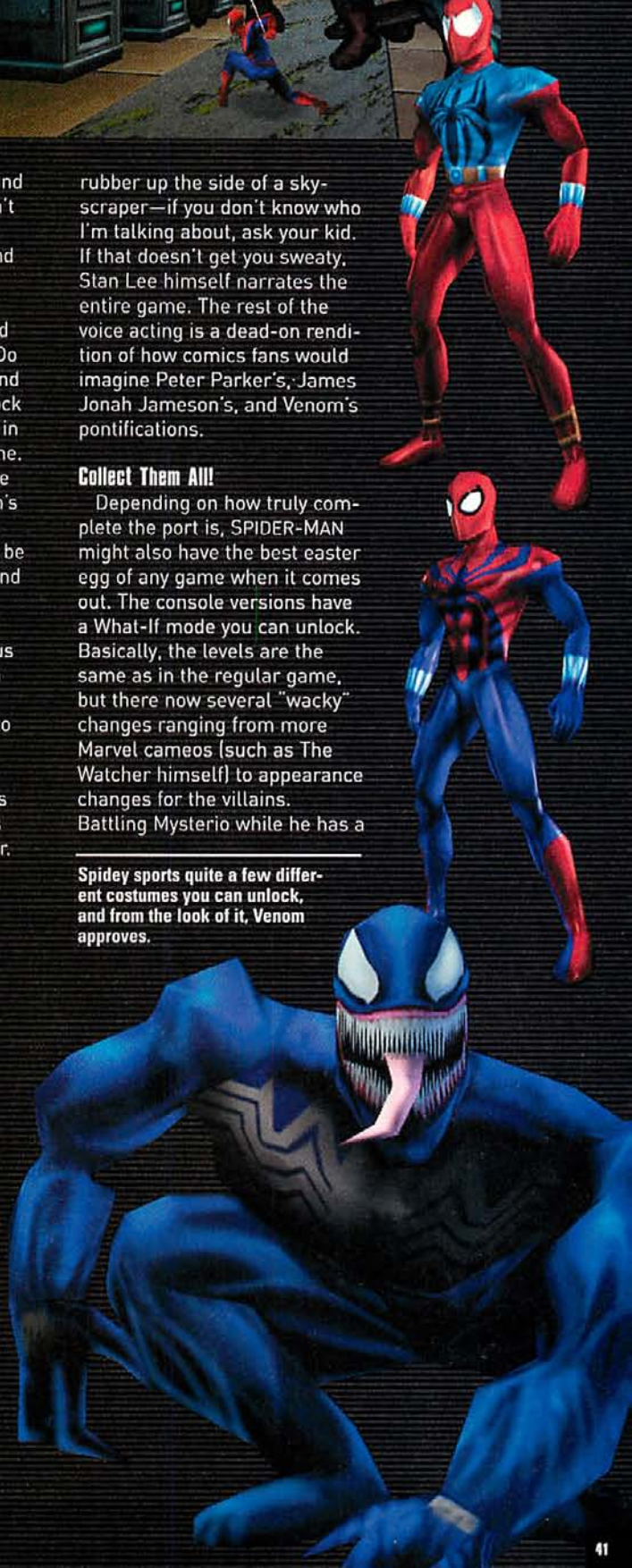
When you're knocking around these levels in New York, don't forget to look at the scenery while you web past bullets and missiles. You won't want to miss the slew of Marvel Universe references plastered on billboards and buildings. Do some wandering and you'll find comic book pickups that unlock historical Spider-Man covers in the gallery section of the game. It's worth the trip back in time to revisit some of Spider-Man's better story lines, and as you meet more characters, you'll be able to see both 3D models and their basic biographical info (plus their first appearance). Other finds include the various costumes that Spidey wore in the comics, ranging from the ultracool Symbiote costume to the hilarious "Amazing Bag Man" costume.

The Seinfeld of superheroes isn't using his web cartridges just to save on cab fare, either. You can use them to create dome shields that explode if you have too many thugs to fend off. Or try forming balls of webbing to chuck at unlucky villains, or wrapping webbing around your fists to get more punch in your punch. Of course, you can also just shoot out strands to ensnare your weaker enemies, or yank strands over the sides of buildings.

The full-motion video cut-scenes were not yet implemented in the beta I saw, but Activision says this is an exact port, so we can expect it to have more costumed cameos than The Love Boat. Although I didn't see him in this build, an example would be a certain ghoulish biker burning rubber up the side of a skyscraper—if you don't know who I'm talking about, ask your kid. If that doesn't get you sweaty, Stan Lee himself narrates the entire game. The rest of the voice acting is a dead-on rendition of how comics fans would imagine Peter Parker's, James Jonah Jameson's, and Venom's pontifications.

Collect Them All!

Depending on how truly complete the port is, SPIDER-MAN might also have the best easter egg of any game when it comes out. The console versions have a What-If mode you can unlock. Basically, the levels are the same as in the regular game, but there now several "wacky" changes ranging from more Marvel cameos (such as The Watcher himself) to appearance changes for the villains. Battling Mysterio while he has a



Spidey sports quite a few different costumes you can unlock, and from the look of it, Venom approves.

fish floating in his helmet is by itself worth unlocking the level.

With the X-Men movie, the upcoming Spider-Man movie, and what appears to be a great port of a great game, comic-book licenses are making the leap to other media with more success. These versions are a far cry from the justifiably unreleased Fantastic Four movie and the unaired JLA pilot I've subjected my coworkers to watching.

Activision seems to be on the right road toward picking Peter Parker up from paper, turning him into ones and zeros, and making what tormented comic-book geek gamers have been clamoring for for years: a great comic-book game. So until I get a Preacher first-person shooter, give me SPIDER-MAN. CGW

Once Bitten, Twice Shy

Spidey made his first blocky appearance in 1983 on the Atari 2600. The Atari version, in hindsight, was quite fun despite the limited things you could do. You maneuvered the webhead up buildings, rescuing hostages and defusing Green Goblin grenades. Unfortunately, there haven't been many gems since then, though there have been many attempts. For a history of console Spidey games, check out **http://videogames.gamespot.com/features/universal/spidey_hist/p2_01.html**. The definitive site for PC-based Spider-Man games is **www.spiderfan.org/software/home_pc/index.html**.

Here's a list of PC games that have featured Spider-Man:

Questprobe #2
Be sure to check out Spider-Man's first appearance in a Windows text-based game, in Scott Adams' QUESTPROBE series. You can download the game at the **spiderfan.org** site.

Spider-Man & Captain America: Doctor Doom's Revenge
The first Spidey action game came out on the Amiga and Commodore in 1989. Bet you can't guess who's in the game.





Amazing Spider-Man
A few years later we got, of all things, a puzzle game, by Paragon Software. Nothing more than a huge maze, it featured Spidey fighting Mysterio to save Mary Jane. This too is available at **spiderfan.org**.

Spider-Man: The Sinister Six
1996 was the last year a computer game featured Spider-Man. THE SINISTER SIX is a kids' game that lets you choose your own path and battle in little minigames along the way.





The Future of Spidey Gaming

Wandering around E3 in May, I uncovered more than a few surprises. First there was the follow-up PS game, SPIDER-MAN 2: ENTER ELECTRO. The demo showed Spider-Man fighting The Sandman; it looked fun.

Next I saw SPIDER-MAN: THE MOVIE for PS2, based (duh) on the upcoming movie. Fighting Green Goblin is at the top of my list for next year.

But the real surprise wasn't the games—it was the glass cases at Activision's booth. Sony had lent Activision an actual web shooter being used in the movie, and it was on display in one case. The second case held the movie version of a pumpkin bomb. To say that I geeked out right then and there would be an understatement.

The video that was playing at Activision's booth showed snippets from the movie, such as Spidey scaling a wall with a camera circling around him. It certainly didn't show enough to wet my whistle, but I guess that's what the movie is for. Overall, I'd say Spider-Man looks like a successful license.

Prepare to embark on a fantastic voyage.



Real Time Simulation A new breed of strategy has been born from the creators of the Settlers. Lead the Viking tribes from their serene homeland into the uncharted, mysterious New World. Interact with the native Mayan, Indian, and Eskimo cultures, in war and in peace. Success hinges on your ability to balance the wider aims of society with the wants and needs of each member of your tribe. The Viking's fate is now in your hands.



"Cultures is a rural version of The Sims."
-PC Gamer

"A perfect balance of strategy and fun."
-Planet PC

CULTURES

Rediscover the New World

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Majestic

Yes, you're paranoid, and yes, they're out to get you

by Jeff Green



GENRE: Adventure
RELEASE DATE: Fall 2001
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Anim-X
CONTACT: www.activision.com

When George Jones wrote about EA's MAJESTIC back in our December 2000 issue, he used a very naughty word to describe what this online adventure game was going to do to your head. He got a lot of grief for using that word, but now that I've actually played through the opening chapter, I'm here to tell you: It was the appropriate word. Because even though I knew what was coming, MAJESTIC still managed to f**k with my head in a major way. And I couldn't have been more thrilled.

A Different Sort of Immersion

MAJESTIC is unlike any game you've ever played, and the only appropriate comparison is to the movie that it was modeled on: *The Game*. If you've never seen it, go rent it before playing MAJESTIC, because it'll give you some idea of what you're getting yourself into. Just like Michael Douglas' overwhelmed character in the movie, when you sign on to MAJESTIC you are committing yourself to a level of immersion you have almost certainly never experienced before.

At its core, MAJESTIC is not radical at all, but harks back to the oldest of genres: the adventure game. This is a mystery, above all, and you make your way through the story by examining clues and solving puzzles. The catch here is that the game itself, as a tangible object, does not really exist. MAJESTIC plays out, in monthly episodes, almost entirely through communication devices you already own: your phone, your fax machine, your Web browser, and your Internet chat program.

And that's what the immersion is all about. With no proper "game interface," you'll use those devices—browsing the Web, making phone calls, chatting online—to solve the puzzles and drive the story forward. When it really gets creepy is when the game starts contacting *you*.

Warning: Spoiler Ahead! Seriously. Stop Right Here.

I'm trying hard here not to give any spoilers, because what made that first chapter so exhilarating for me was the sense of discovery and surprise—something you rarely get from a computer game. I'll tell you only what the story's about: MAJESTIC takes the form of an *X-Files*-style mystery involving a decades-long government conspiracy to hide the truth of alien contact with Earth. And the name "Majestic" is a real-life reference, long-known by UFO aficionados, to a secret government agency supposedly formed in the 1950s to handle the problem.

How you get wrapped up in this mystery, however, is what I don't want to ruin. I will spoil only the very beginning (STOP HERE if you really want to know nothing), just to give you an idea of the cleverness at work here. The very first puzzle in the first episode I played came in the form of an "official" email I received from Electronic Arts, telling me that MAJESTIC was being cancelled. They got me. I believed it. I followed the Web link on the email, and the mystery had begun.

Over the course of the following week I became completely absorbed, scouring Web sites (some fictional, some not), listening in on someone's (a fictional character? I don't know) voice mail, scanning newspaper clippings for clues. And the first time the game contacted *me*, sending me an instant message while I was in my office at *CGW*, in the middle of typing a story, I was terrified—and hooked.

The Only Thing to Fear...

If this sounds like a bit much, if the notion of a game contacting you sounds too intrusive or scary, then here's a word of reassurance. Virtually everything in MAJESTIC is controllable, right from the start. EA knows it's playing with fire here, and it's being more than careful. Anything you're not comfortable with, you can toggle off. So you can opt to receive no faxes or phone calls. Or you can specify that calls be made only to a certain number, and only at certain hours. You can have a prerecorded message play before any calls, alerting you that the call is part of the game. Furthermore—and this is crucial—you need to manually load the game and log in for anything to actually happen at any given time. If you're logged out, there's no game. The level of immersion is up to you. Stay logged in all the time, and you're always in the game.

MAJESTIC is quite simply unlike anything we've seen before. It's essentially a brand-new form of entertainment. And from what I've seen of it so far, it works—if you give into it. There hasn't been an adventure game—or any game—this novel and exciting in years, and I for one can't wait to get creeped out all over again when the game launches this fall. CGW

Multi-Player Online Game
and Comic Books

Redmoon



Read the first comic book of the 18-volume series on the CGW disk included with this issue, and then visit

www.redmoon-online.com

for more, as well as to download the *free* game software or order a CD.

Join the thousands of players already immersed in the world of Redmoon!

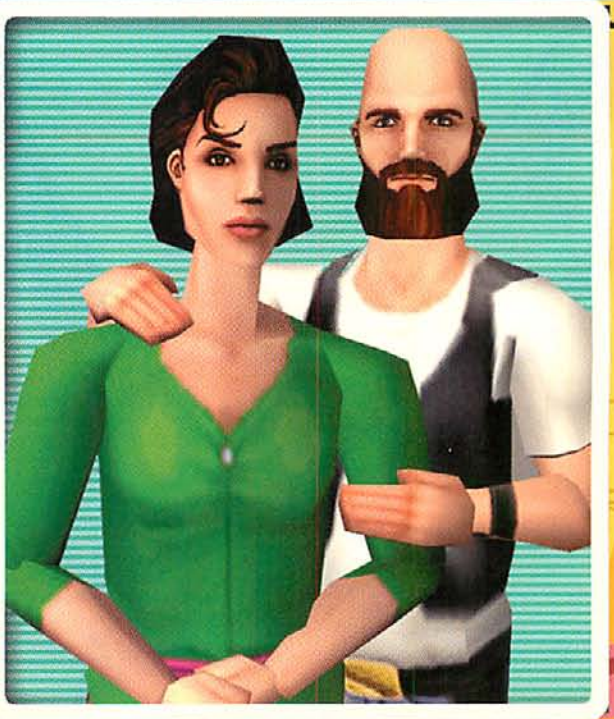
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TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Blood
Animated Violence

VALLEY OF THE DOLLS

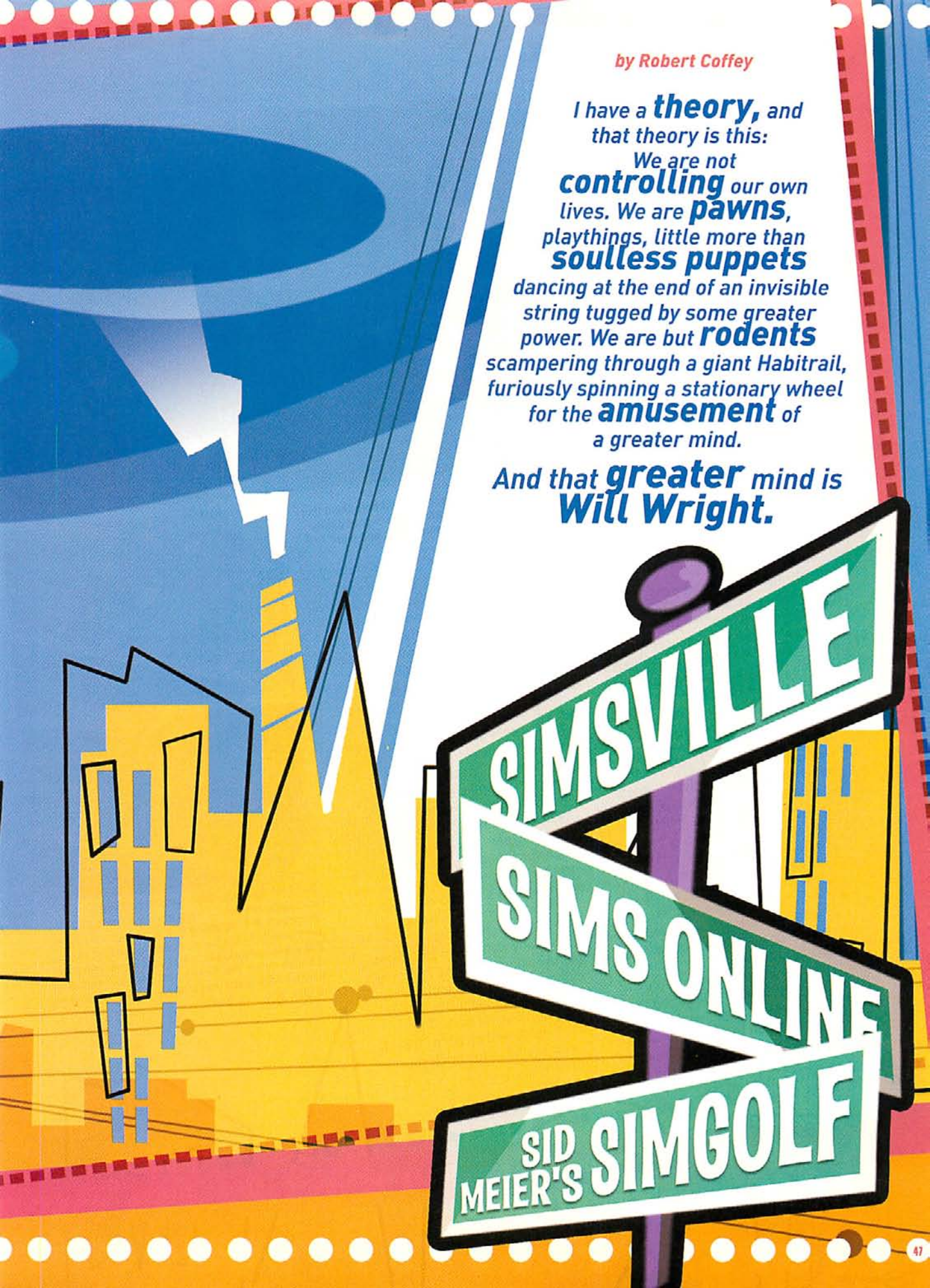
Destroying lives, one village of the damned at a time



by Robert Coffey

I have a **theory,** and that theory is this: We are not **controlling** our own lives. We are **pawns**, playthings, little more than **soulless puppets** dancing at the end of an invisible string tugged by some greater power. We are but **rodents** scampering through a giant Habitrail, furiously spinning a stationary wheel for the **amusement** of a greater mind.

And that **greater** mind is **Will Wright.**



Think about it: Are we not THE SIMS? While we labor under the illusion that we are exercising some control over the lives of our little computer people, isn't it really Will Wright who's screwing with *us*, watching as millions of players dress up and play with their digital dolls? Don't the repercussions of giving our Sims a cuckoo clock pale in comparison with the ripples created in our own lives by Maxis' release of THE SIMS? With every photo album we post to www.thesims.com isn't Wright getting a deeper look into what makes us tick than we're getting into ourselves by creating that album?

Apparently, however, Will Wright is getting bored. He's preparing to expand the Skinner box of SIM products with SIMSVILLE, a game that will shed light on how much we really care about our neighbors just as THE SIMS laid our souls bare. Prepare to dance once again for his amusement.



Sims need friends, and you'll help them find those friends by throwing backyard dance parties, weekend barbecues, and more.

Welcome to Lilliput

Straddling the vast expanse of gameplay between the economic game that is SIMCITY and the humanity simulator that is THE SIMS, SIMSVILLE will allow players to control a much larger number of Sims that THE SIMS allows. Let's face it, even the best players have difficulty managing a family of more than four. SIMSVILLE is being built to let you manipulate, torment, and reward hundreds of make-believe humans, while offering a deeper exploration of the themes first raised in THE SIMS. This time out, friendship is conducted on a much broader scale and the impact of environment on one's well-being has grown beyond the immediacy of hearth and home to include a Sim's entire zip code. This is a game about solving not personal, but social problems.

It all starts simply enough. You select one of four families to be the first to settle your new hamlet. A house sprouts on the selected lot, a moving van arrives, and the family moves in. And then, like all good citizens across this glorious country, they start complaining. Vociferously.

Just as in THE SIMS, the denizens of SIMSVILLE have needs and it's up to you to meet them. Immediately upon moving into town, Sims will need jobs and food—you're going to have to build farms and markets almost immediately just to meet the most basic of these needs. And your citizens' wants get much more complex. With eight career tracks (including medicine, business, academic, mechanics, and civil service) randomly assigned to your Sims, you'll need to provide businesses that suit their skill sets. You'll also have to engineer friendships between Sims, inviting like-minded Sims to parties at each other's homes and keeping them moving in the same social, work, and neighborhood circles.

You really won't want your Sims to grow disgruntled and leave town; nothing leads to civic malaise faster than abandoned buildings. Fortunately, you'll have 50 to 70 stores as well as 20 to 30 businesses available to enrich your Sims' lives.





Don't let the small-town setting fool you—managing the social lives of your Sims is still important. A compatible mix of successful neighbors results in the happy scene in the first shot. But when antagonistic neighbors move in and run a house down, the people next door will throw up barbed-wire walls and blithely ignore the torching of their enemies' home.

Genre: Strategy • **Developer:** Maxis • **Publisher:** Electronic Arts • ***simsville.ea.com*** • **Release Date:** Q1 02



A well-managed town in SIMSVILLE will be a suburban utopia, with a thriving commercial district on Main Street and block after block of manicured lawns and shimmering houses.

Earning the Village Green

You won't be able to just plop down a hospital the instant your Sims demand it, though. Nor will you be able to open restaurants, build a hardware store, pave roads, create a parking lot, or launch a movie theater at will. As in all SIM games, you have to pay for these amenities, and the key to having enough public funds is creating a booming economy. As your Sims prosper and conduct business, you'll collect a straight sales tax to fund civic life. Manage things well enough and you'll be able to indulge in special events like town parades or holding sales at various stores.

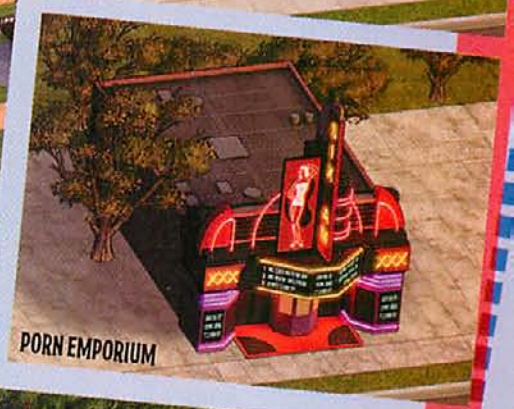
You'll also manage the finances of your individual Sim families. Their jobs will earn them household money, which you'll need to spend for them on backyard items (many of them carryovers from THE SIMS such as barbecues, pools, and basketball hoops) and structural improvements on their homes and lawns.

Balancing the concerns of the town with those of individual families is what should provide the game's challenge—and probably a lot of entertainment for Mr. Wright. Neglecting the concerns of either could result in a downward spiral of terrifying proportions. Luxurious swimming pools will fill with brackish sludge, the homey movie theater will degrade into a porn palace, the effete wine shop will start selling screw-top wine to homeless people who wander the streets. Kite fliers in the parks will become muggers' prey, and the picture-perfect *Leave It to Beaver* landscape will break down to a pockmarked expanse of stripped cars and decrepit homes sporting barbed-wire fences to keep warring neighbors from strangling each other. The Sims who can afford it will lead an exodus out of town.

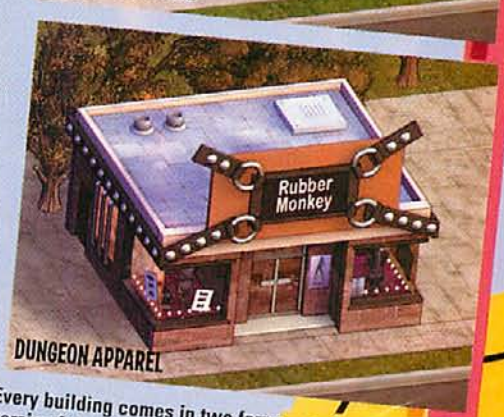
There Are a Million Stories in the Naked SimVillage

With SIMSVILLE ratcheting up the potential scope of

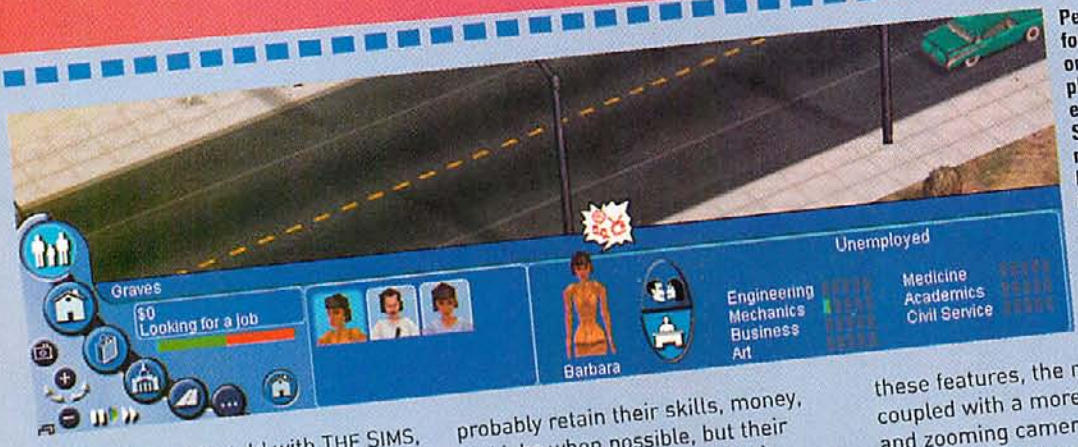








Every building comes in two forms—a nice, pretty version for prosperous towns and its gritty red-light district opposite.



Penniless, looking for a job, short on skills, and completely deprived of entertainment, this Sim and the management challenges of her life should be instantly recognizable to veterans of THE SIMS.

stories that can be told with THE SIMS, Maxis is again including the Family Album, whose screenshot and caption combo lets you record and create stories from town shenanigans. The snapshot feature will work in tandem with THE SIMS, allowing users to create ever more elaborate soap operas by jumping back and forth between the two games. It makes sense since Maxis is planning on allowing gamers to move avatars from the earlier game into SIMSVILLE's burbs (transfers won't be complete; relocated Sims will probably retain their skills, money, and jobs when possible, but their homes will be completely new).

Maxis has opted out of including seasonal changes in the initial release—rather than creating all-new art for every object, as seasons would require, the developer has wisely decided to focus on providing a variety of objects—but the jury is still out on whether the game will include day-to-night cycles. While the look of the game could only benefit from the inclusion of these features, the new 3D objects coupled with a more fluidly moving and zooming camera already make SIMSVILLE perhaps the prettiest SIM game yet.

This much is certain—when SIMSVILLE ships sometime early next year, millions of people will buy it. It'll be fun, it'll be addictive, and it'll give us the illusion of control and power. But we'll just be kidding ourselves. The only man truly playing is Will Wright—and he's playing with us. CGW

SID MEIER'S SIMGOLF

In a team-up of such magnitude that even Power Man and Iron Fist quiver like frightened kindergarteners before it, two of the biggest brains in gaming have melded into one pulsing, massive Super Colossal Game Brain. And together, what have the titanic cerebrums of renowned braniacs and *CGW* Hall of Famers Sid Meier and Will Wright wrought? A golf game.

Okay, so maybe it isn't going to set the world on fire, but know this: Because it leverages the Midas qualities of both the SIM franchise and Sid's return to the wildly popular "tycoon" style of gaming, SID MEIER'S SIMGOLF is pretty much a surefire hit. And, honestly, it looks like a pretty decent game. Gamers will build a links empire, designing luxurious courses and making money by collecting greens fees and club memberships from sim golfers. Plenty of feedback from golfers will let you know if you're designing courses that are both fun and challenging—the key to profitability. As your business grows, you'll be able to expand across the globe, building courses in each of the four available climates and (hopefully) enticing celebrities to purchase prime real estate right next to the fairways.

In keeping with the game's emphasis on economics, you will be able to play your courses, but only in a limited way and only to win bets against a course pro in classic match play. A light RPG element lets you develop portions of your simple point-and-click golf game, improving your ability to win wagers so that you can buy more benches, bunkers, and ball washers. Online play won't be competitive, but you will be able to upload and download courses for comparison and co-opting. SID MEIER'S SIMGOLF has slated a tee time of sometime this fall. CGW



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MATURE M — CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence

DARKWORKS
GAME DEVELOPMENT STUDIO

GAME BOY COLOR

PC CD ROM

PlayStation

INFOGRAMES

Screenshots are from PlayStation game.

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THE SIMS ONLINE

Ladies and gentlemen, prepare to urinate publicly

Imagine the Pope, Batman, and the Captain & Tennille as roommates. Imagine that they own and operate a sprawling casino. And that to maximize profitability, His Holiness and the Caped Crusader have installed turnstiles on all the bathroom doors so every customer has to pay to pee. The incredibly open-ended gameplay of THE SIMS ONLINE (TSO) practically guarantees such a scenario.

Every player will get one of 50,000 lots available in a city and be able to design and build their dream home. But unlike THE SIMS, this game lets players play with other humans, pooling resources, sharing homes, and screwing the proletariat. In keeping with the user friendliness that has been a hallmark of THE SIMS, gamers will be able to upload new skins, heads, floors, and walls and use all of them in the game. Has any game ever been so user defined? Outside of text-based MUDs, I don't think so.

And what can you do in this wide-open gameworld? Pretty much anything you can do or wish you could do in life (with the exception of crime). Only now, it's play. Indeed, in the context of THE SIMS ONLINE Maxis refers to the various facets of human existence as games. Want to play the Economy Game? Then get out there make some money, capitalizing on the Sims' needs (eating and bodily elimination are ripe for exploitation) or desires (user-created entertainment should crop up nanoseconds after the game goes live). Want to play the Roommate Game? Move in with someone. Want to earn money playing the Visitor Game? Then open a casino, a bar, a coffee house, or a museum—or just throw a turnstile by your front door and con people into dropping by your home. As for building a huge house full of tiny rooms featuring Jennifer Lopez look-alikes and the vibrating bed from the LIVIN' LARGE expansion, the *CGW* edit staff has dibs on that.



That's What Friends Are For

Since you'll control only one Sim at a time instead of a whole family (though every account will be entitled to create up to three avatars), social interaction is going to be a huge part of this game. Big surprise there. But in order to build upon the inevitable chat-style interaction between players, the design team is adding at least 60 new animations. So while you'll still be able to choose Kiss when interacting with another Sim, selecting that option from the now-familiar SIMS spiderweb interface will open up a number of new options including a classic Valentino Dip Kiss, perfect for sweeping your beloved off his or her feet. With new dances, new insult gestures, and new ways to pester and endear also in the mix, TSO has the potential to play like a global puppeteering simulation.

Even the most antisocial players are going to want their puppets to get along with at least a few others. One of the primary ways for Sims to earn money will be to band together to operate large Rube Goldberg-style machines. With each Sim manning a station best suited to their personal aptitude—the high-logic Sim pressing buttons, the mechanical-minded Sim yanking levers, and so on—multiple Sims will earn money based on how efficiently they can work contraptions like the Paper Sorting Machine.

In what may be wry commentary on human nature, friendship is a commodity, a limited form of currency that you can spend on other Sims and that they can bestow upon you. While actual friendships obviously cannot be defined this way (you can still play with buddies and never spend any friendship on them) it will be used in creating Sim celebrities in the Popularity Game. Popularity will also play a part in navigating the web of Sim relationships via a spoked interface that echoes the primary interface.

Further greasing the wheels of social interaction will be minigames that play more like traditional games —a welcome break from the Clean the House game. Sims visiting casinos will be able to gamble their simoleans in real blackjack; less adventurous types can play chess while sipping a latte at a Sim-owned coffee shop. Sims will even be able to play Spin the Bottle, a perfect warm-up before visiting the *CGW* House of J Lo.

The possibilities (and probabilities) are endless. Open-mike nights, cults, separatist movements, professional beggars, theater troupes, business empires built on pay toilets, mass weddings of costumed superheroes, chess tournaments, love, hate, joy, despair—TSO could be like real life in all its weirdness. Only better. CGW



Genre: Strategy? RPG? • **Developer:** Maxis • **Publisher:** Electronic Arts • **www.thesimsonline.com** • **Release Date:** Q2

http://www.gamespot.com/theonlywayyouwilleverbeaninja/

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E3

Platform Wars Heat Up in L.A.

In the gaming universe, the year officially begins in May. That's when the gaming industry gathers for three days to engage in the obscenely over-the-top, chest-thumping ritual called the Electronic Entertainment Expo, or E3. This is gaming's Big Event, with companies from all over the planet spending literally millions of dollars to construct elaborate booths, hire celebrities and booth babes, and throw lavish parties—all to get everyone to notice how great they are. It's gaming's annual beauty contest, and this year the competition was hotter than ever, with brand-new consoles slugging it out next to tons of PC titles. The *CGW* staff flew en masse to the show, bringing many questions and expectations. This is our report.



Photography by Joe Torino



Q: Is PC Gaming Still Alive?

A: Emphatically yes. And don't ask us again.

Yeah, we'd be lying if we said we didn't go into this year's E3 without some feelings of dread. The PC gaming death drums have been beating for a while now, and though we do not and never did believe the doomsayers, we did go to the show with diminished expectations. How could we not? We knew beforehand that it was going to be all about consoles this year, with the big public showdown between Nintendo's GameCube, Sony's PS2, and Microsoft's Xbox. We expected, given all that hype and noise, that the PC would have a lower profile at the show than in years past. And in fact, it did.

In some cases, this was downright depressing. Microsoft, a name synonymous with PC gaming, put the Xbox front and center in its booth, with its PC games shoved a bit unceremoniously off to one side. Both Activision and Sierra—two PC gaming giants—were actively peddling console titles this year. And flight sims and PC sports titles were almost entirely missing in action.

But the bigger truth, and the greatest news about the show, is that despite all the console hullabaloo, this was a great show for PC games, and it gave us serious hope—no, let's say conviction—that the next couple of years are going to give us some outstanding titles that will prove definitively that PC gaming is alive and well and not going anywhere at all anytime soon.

Though we just dissed Microsoft for its Xbox overhype, in fairness the company scored big with strategy titles AGE OF MYTHOLOGY and SIGMA and the RPG DUNGEON SIEGE—all very PC-centric game experiences. LucasArts, which we've been worrying about ever since the words *Jar Jar* entered the popular vocabulary, had the most amazing show it's probably ever had—thanks mainly to the one game that almost everyone, regardless of platform allegiance, agrees stole the show: STAR WARS: GALAXIES, a massively multiplayer RPG being developed by Verant, creator of EVERQUEST. You won't be playing that game on a console box in this lifetime.

There were other signs of life everywhere: Activision's RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN, Bethesda's MORROWIND, EA's MAJESTIC and THE SIMS ONLINE, Interplay's NEVERWINTER NIGHTS—the list goes on. So stop worrying; let the console hype wash over you. There's no avoiding it anyway. Go ahead and get a GameCube or Xbox—we know we will. But don't be a fool. Don't sell that PC yet. There are some amazing games coming this year—new and fresh experiences that you'll be able to have only in the computer gaming world.

> **"There are some amazing games coming your way this year—new and fresh experiences."**



Star Wars: Galaxies

Game of SHOW

ULTIMA ONLINE proved that massively multiplayer games are viable. EVERQUEST proved that they could look good and actually be fun. But STAR WARS: GALAXIES will prove that massively multiplayer worlds can turn millions of people into online gaming fanatics. Because if this game doesn't become a worldwide gaming phenomenon, nothing will.

Developed by the creator of EVERQUEST, SWG is so beautifully crafted it makes you feel like you're in a *Star Wars* film. Forget pixelated characters with artificial movements—we're talking about realistic characters conversing with each other, fighting with light sabers and blasters, and zipping around in vehicles. Everything is built to scale and meticulously detailed: Grass ripples in the breeze; characters blink and have a range of expressions; 100 different animals move as if they had real weight. The GeForce3-powered graphics are amazing, and the sound effects, created by Skywalker Sound, are equally impressive—the AT-AT has exactly the same metallic clank it had in *The Empire Strikes Back*.

Players will pick one of eight races, customize their appearance, and choose a specialty, such as smuggler or droid dealer. You'll be able to race speeders, catch and train animals, program droids, build and customize houses, and even become the mayor of a town. It'll also be possible to become a Jedi (or Dark Jedi), but it will be very difficult to do so.

The game will draw upon elements from the classic *Star Wars* trilogy and episodes *I* and *II*. A larger conflict between the Empire and the Rebellion will provide a major subtext to the game. And since no STAR WARS game could be complete without space combat, an expansion pack will deliver astonishingly authentic space-based shootouts.

Seeing the demo for STAR WARS: GALAXIES was almost a religious experience. It's obvious that this game will not only redefine what a STAR WARS game can be, but will shape online gaming for years to come. In the meantime, "patient you must be." Don't expect to make the jump to hyperspace until early 2003.







Q: Are STAR WARS Games Finally Getting Better? A: Oh, yeah.

For the past few years, LucasArts' STAR WARS games have disappointed us, so we weren't expecting to be blown away by the latest offerings. But that's exactly what happened. LucasArts' STAR WARS lineup has never looked stronger, and the franchise appears poised to rise from the ashes and reclaim its once-proud heritage.

STAR WARS: GALAXIES was mind-blowing, and most of the other STAR WARS games were no slouches either. KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC, LucasArts' single-player RPG set 4,000 years before *Episode I*, combines next-generation graphics with the depth of BALDUR'S GATE II.

JEDI KNIGHT II, the sequel to the last great STAR WARS game, has been in development for only a few months, but already it seems to have the clever level design of its predecessor. Even the console games look good: The space shooter ROGUE LEADER is among the most touted games for the upcoming Nintendo GameCube.

So what's Lucas doing differently? The company is working with the best developers to ensure that its games match the quality of Lucas films. GALAXIES is being developed by Verant, the maker of EVERQUEST. KNIGHTS is being developed by BioWare, creator of the hugely successful BALDUR'S GATE. Even JEDI KNIGHT II is being developed externally, by Raven Software—the creator of SOLDIER OF FORTUNE. About the only game that didn't impress us was GALACTIC BATTLEGROUNDS, which is being developed in-house using Ensemble Studios' AGE OF EMPIRES II technology.

So are STAR WARS games getting better? We won't really have our answer until 2002, when all the STAR WARS PC games except GALACTIC BATTLEGROUNDS are slated for release. But even now, we're sure the answer is yes.



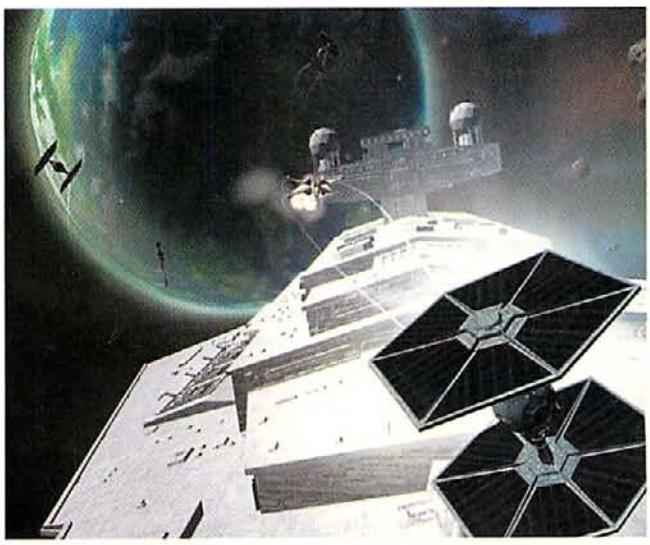
JEDI OUTCAST: JEDI KNIGHT II: Raven Software (HERETIC, HEXEN, SOLDIER OF FORTUNE) is taking the helm for this long-overdue sequel to one of the best PC action games ever made.







STAR WARS: GALAXIES—SPACE EXPANSION: Though it won't ship with the game at first, LucasArts and Verant are promising an expansion that will let you engage in massively multiplayer space combat and travel.



Best of Show #2
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault

Intense. Visceral. Gut-wrenchingly realistic. These are a few of the words we've used to describe the most action-packed demo at E3. From the start it felt less like a game than like a movie, resembling the opening scene of *Saving Private Ryan*—but in playable form. Incoming shells scored a direct hit on a nearby landing craft, blasting soldiers through the air. At the beach, our squad jumped into a hail of bullets, some dying, some breaking down as we raced up the beach to blow up razor wire with bangalore mines. Following yelled orders, we took out German gunners, raced through trenches, fought through bunkers, and emerged victorious at the top, to the sight of hundreds of allied ships stacked up like a scene from *The Longest Day*. This is the closest thing we've seen to the ideal action/war game, and it stands tall at the forefront of exciting things to come for the PC. Very tall.









Best of Show #3
Age of Mythology

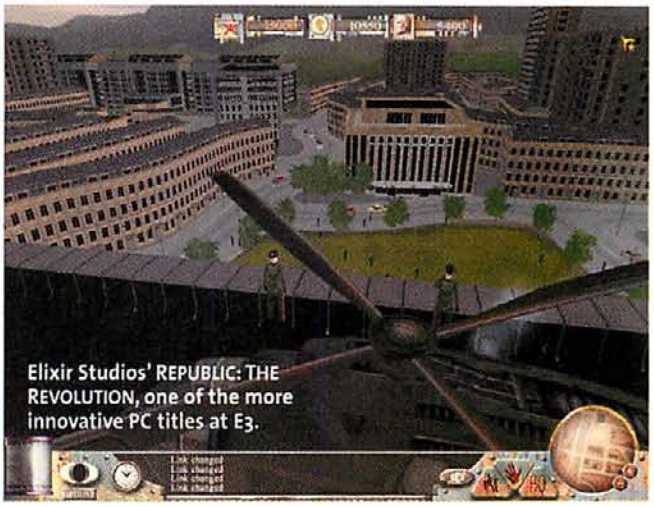
Don't worry, Ensemble isn't making some geeky fantasy RTS with orcs and elves. AGE OF MYTHOLOGY retains AOE's sense of history and strategy, and manages to fuse that with elements of myth that our ancestors regarded as truth. Hence, you can have frost giants support cavalry, or send dexterous Anubites to leap up and strike down enemy archers before you move in the rest of your troops. And you'll forget any reservations you had about the 3D engine when you start calling down meteors and lightning storms. The sometime-next-year release date allows for plenty of time to stabilize and balance the game before it reaches shelves. Another solid hit from Ensemble in the making.

Q: Was E3 Awash in PC Games Innovation? A: Yes and no.

E3 began with a bit of a PC gaming scare when it was rumored that groundbreaking games DEUS EX 2 and THIEF 3 would lead on the Xbox, with PC ports being released several months later. The idea that gaming guru Warren Spector would defect to the console market sent shivers up and down the spines of the PC faithful attending the show. Fortunately, Spector himself assured us that he has no plans to release a console version of DEX2 or T3 before a PC version, or to compromise one version to accommodate the needs of another. Whew.

But while the continuing development of innovative gameplay seems assured for those franchises, the rest of the PC market appears to be settling for more incremental improvement. UNREAL II has added a simple squad command system à la team-based games of UNREAL TOURNAMENT. A slightly more realistic resource model and the effects of "culture" are being added to CIV III. Relic's SIGMA is relying on a unit tree limited only by a player's imagination, while BATTLE REALMS has a more intricate living-resource system that could open up new strategic challenges without sacrificing gameplay. There were other games making similarly smallish steps forward, but where was this year's BLACK & WHITE? Where were the games that'll set precedents and reshape PC gaming?

"REPUBLIC isn't much to look at, but we're confident that the visuals will be beefed up."

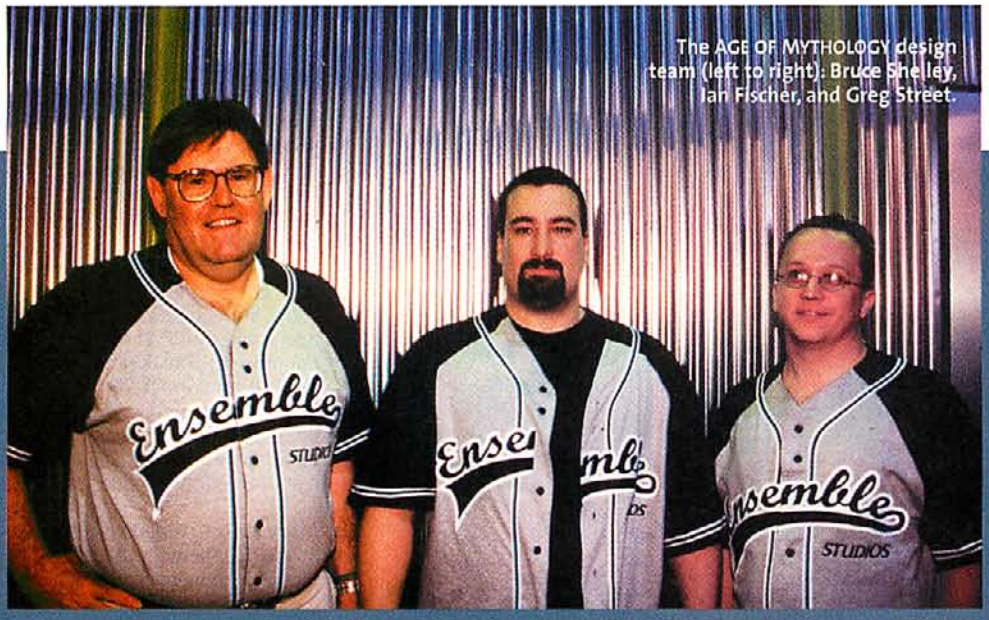


Elixir Studios' REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION, one of the more innovative PC titles at E3.

They were in two small meeting rooms well off the show floor. More than any other PC titles we saw, EA's MAJESTIC and Elixir Studios' REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION are eagerly rewriting whatever rules there are in gaming. Deep in its murky heart, MAJESTIC is nothing more than a traditional adventure game, a conspiracy thriller steeped in paranoia. However, in the case of MAJESTIC it's not the message but the medium that's exciting. Breaking through the fourth wall of the computer monitor, MAJESTIC comes to you, delivering its disturbing contents and puzzles through actual email, instant messages, faxes, and honest-to-god phone calls. It's unprecedented immersion without a single GeForce3 bump-mapped, shaded pixel in sight. (For more on MAJESTIC, check out our exclusive hands-on preview in this issue.)

Well over a year away, REPUBLIC is a god game without a deity. Starting out with just one follower and a small headquarters, you need to take the reins of power in a breakaway Soviet republic. Graphically, REPUBLIC isn't much to look at right now, but we're confident that the somewhat bland visuals will be beefed up, because the Totality engine powering the game is comparable to BLACK & WHITE's in terms of scalability and ability to push bazillions of polygons.

What grabbed us about REPUBLIC, though, was the scope and nature of its gameplay. You'll work to grab power through actions you order from third parties. Using the real-world resources of military force, money, and influence, you can finance assassinations, frame rivals, manipulate media, control the church, and much, much more—all while juggling the demands of and competing with 15 rival factions. Tracking your political and moral development in even more detail than BLACK & WHITE, REPUBLIC is so exacting it's practically a simulation. REPUBLIC might well be the most fascinating game shown at E3.



The AGE OF MYTHOLOGY design team (left to right): Bruce Shelley, Ian Fischer, and Greg Street.

Team Ensemble

Though they may look like rejects from a *Bad News Bears* movie here, these gentlemen are in fact three of the star players for one of gaming's major league powerhouses, Ensemble Studios. Their AGE OF EMPIRES games sold millions, and they're looking to do it again with the upcoming AGE OF MYTHOLOGY.



Best of Show #4 Return to Castle Wolfenstein

For all that talk about innovation and stretching the boundaries of game design, a good old-fashioned Nazi-blasting romp like RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN still gets our blood pressure up. B.J. Blaskowitz is back, and he's here to kick some serious zombie ass in gorgeous 3D, with help from id Software's QUAKE III ARENA engine and the deft designers at Grey Matter. No word on the return of robot Hitler, but you can be sure that nutjob Himmler has some nasty surprises up his sleeve. With everything from historically accurate firearms to super-chainguns and a sweet flamethrower, you'll be well equipped for the job.



Q: Where the Hell Is DUKE NUKEM Forever?

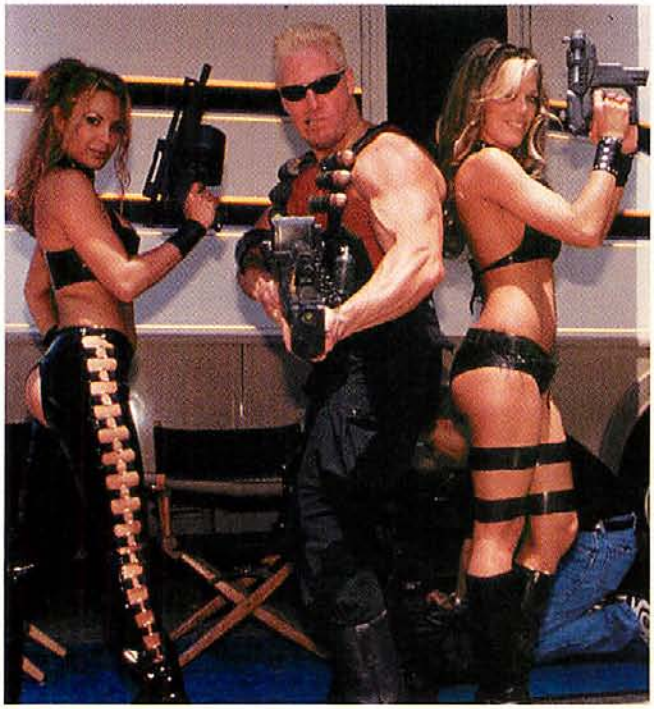
A: Trapped in a bunch of PCs at 3DRealms.

Although it's been in development for years, all anyone saw of DUKE NUKEM FOREVER at E3 this year was a rolling video at either the G.O.D. Lot or Take 2/Rockstar's booth. That's it. The video displayed the huge graphical leaps that 3DRealms has made, mostly in portraying the various aliens, people, and environments that Duke will run across. It also showed an ample number of vehicles, with Duke riding motorcycles, jeeps, and even a donkey. Reaction to the demo was mixed. Some of the editors were impressed by 3DRealms' display of environmental interaction above and beyond the typical shooter. Others asked the more cynical question, "Sure, the vehicles look nice, but where the hell is the actual game?"

We couldn't track down George Broussard or Scott Miller of 3DRealms, so we'll assume they're sticking with the "it'll come out when it's done" line. People who remember past E3s may view this situation as a repeat of PREY, but we have more faith. The DNF demo displayed honest-to-god gameplay this time, and even though some questioned the overall play style, they admitted that at least it showed that 3DRealms has been doing something for the past two years. Maybe someday we'll get to see if DNF is truly as innovative and different as Broussard purports it to be.

There were some other well-known games missing in action: Ion Storm's ANACHRONOX, said to be in the home stretch, was kept at home in Dallas. The team didn't want the stigma of showing a demo for the third E3 in a row. TEAM FORTRESS 2 is again sequestered at Valve, and the only new nugget we could dig up from the development team is the fact that COUNTER-STRIKE 2 will use the TF2 engine.

But the most oft-heard "where is..." question throughout the show, from editors and developers alike, was "Where's Wil?" in reference to our sometime technical editor Wil O'Neal, who wandered around aimlessly, fondling beers and drinking in the booth babes instead of working like the rest of us editorial goons.





Many games were on display at the G.O.D. Lot, in the trailers pictured in the background here.



Q: Is Blizzard Losing It? A: Not yet.

For the past few E3s, Blizzard has blown us away with its games. This year, however, there were doubters. That's not surprising, considering that DIABLO II launched with online problems and WARCRAFT III has been subject to delays and development turmoil. But do those setbacks mean Blizzard is losing it?

This year, we took a long look at Blizzard's two new games—WARCRAFT III and DIABLO II: LORD OF DESTRUCTION—to see whether Blizzard still has its magic touch. To be honest, we weren't blown away by WARCRAFT III last year, but this year it looked phenomenally better. The graphics were more detailed, the 3D nature of the game was more pronounced, and more of the actual gameplay was on display.

But while WARCRAFT III got better over the past year, so did its competition. In fact, Ensemble Studios' AGE OF MYTHOLOGY and Crave's BATTLE REALMS were both more impressive, at least visually. Though WARCRAFT III was among the top RTS games at the show, it wasn't a clear favorite.

Still, even if WARCRAFT III didn't have the graphical flair of either AGE OF MYTHOLOGY or BATTLE REALMS, it did seem to have the most developed gameplay. As Blizzard has proved repeatedly in the past, no one creates better RTS gameplay, and there was no evidence that this trend will stop with WARCRAFT III. Knowing Blizzard, it will keep tinkering with the game until it's cooked just right.

Ultimately, WARCRAFT III looked good and DIABLO II: LORD OF DESTRUCTION will undoubtedly make DIABLO II even better. Blizzard hardly ever disappoints. It's just that this year, the competition was fiercer and other games looked fresher.

So has Blizzard lost it? No, but it better watch out. The competition is closing the gap.



Best of Show #5 Battle Realms

We tagged Liquid Entertainment's RTS as a hit in the making more than a year ago, and E3 has only reinforced that belief. Much of this fantasy/Asian history hybrid is finished and it looks great, particularly the huge variety of leaping, twirling combat animations that manage to capture the excitement of combat while maintaining the sense of humor vital to a game featuring a unit that hurls diseased vomit. And the pathfinding system is sure to become an industry standard. Rigorous playtesting and balancing are the name of the game now.



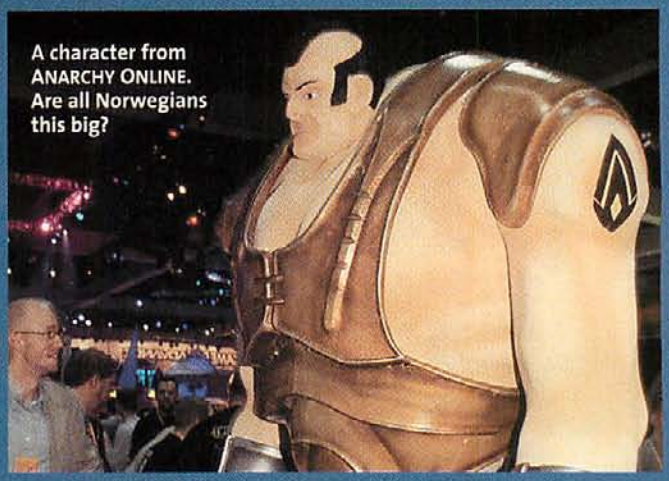
Q: What Is the Next EVERQUEST?

A: Keep your eye on those clever Norwegians at Funcom.

Does subscription-based massively multiplayer have a future beyond UO and EVERQUEST? Are all those registered, paying users—totaling over half a million for the two games—a mere fluke, or is the pay-to-play online model here to stay? We left E3 without a clear answer, but we were able to survey the battlefield and get a sense of the combatants in the coming online war.

The biggest player is EA.com, which is betting the future of its premium subscription service on three promising titles. SIMS ONLINE is still a good year away, but the demo showed a strong translation of the original's crack-like gameplay to the online realm, so it's almost guaranteed to succeed. EARTH AND BEYOND, in which you use a custom ship to explore, trade, and fight across a universe, and MOTOR CITY ONLINE, a slick racing program, round out EA's online offerings. Each of the two could capture a strong audience, but the depth and community offered by EVERQUEST—essential components for a massively multiplayer game—were not apparent.

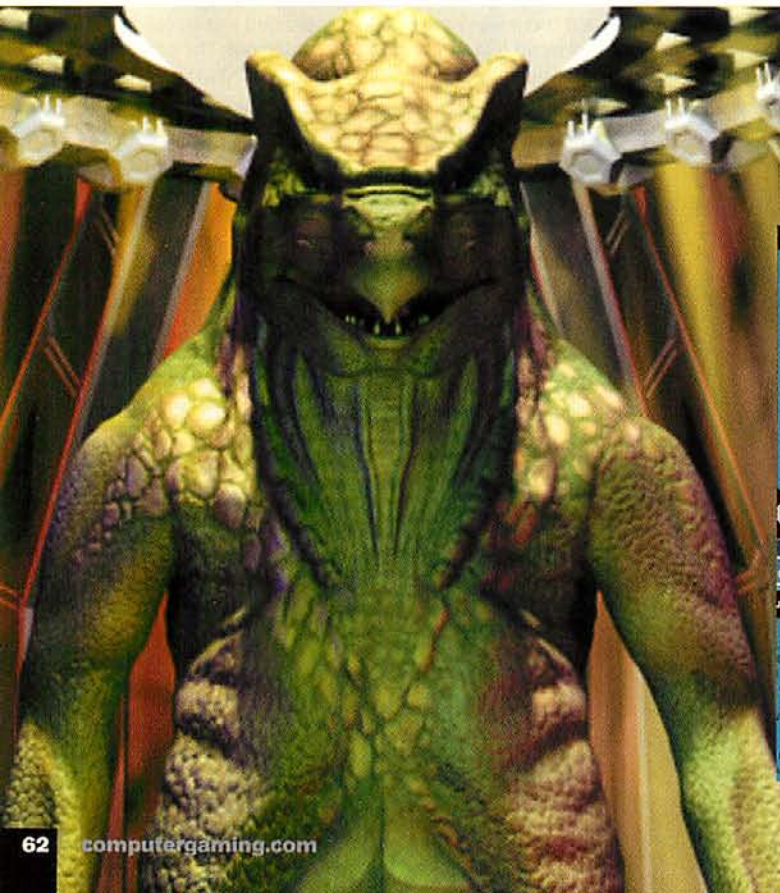
The most flat-out must-play massively multiplayer game of the show was, of course, STAR WARS: GALAXIES, but that's still a ways out. It represents the third generation of multiplayer gaming, while "smaller" games like DARK AGE OF CAMELOT, SHADOWBANE, and ANARCHY ONLINE represent the second. These games show the most ambition, but their survival is anything but assured. Of the three, ANARCHY showed the best and is the closest to launch. The mix of slick visuals, a wild sci-fi/fantasy setting, and deep character development made it the most promising second-generation online game at E3. The question is, can Funcom, a Norwegian company with a small American presence, handle the unique challenges of a massively multiplayer rollout and net a large enough audience to turn a profit? By fall, ANARCHY may have the answer for us.



A character from ANARCHY ONLINE. Are all Norwegians this big?



SHADOWBANE is another "smaller" player in the MMORPG war that shows lots of promise.



Best of Show #6 Master of Orion III



Who would have thought the MOO3 demo would be the most entertaining of the show? A four-man tag team of unbridled enthusiasm, the Quicksilver Software contingent's excitement about this reinvention of a 4X space-gaming classic was positively contagious. This is a game that celebrates its genre and history like no other, even as it goes about reworking the form by offering more victory paths and reducing micromanagement in the endgame. How gloriously, unashamedly wonky is MOO3? Every space system is built around a 30MB spreadsheet of real astronomic data. MOO3, which expands 4X to 5X, should be out in early 2002.



Best of Show #7 Neverwinter Nights

The one online RPG almost certain to survive the coming bloodbath is the one that isn't massively multiplayer. But NEVERWINTER NIGHTS' smaller scope ironically makes it even more inclusive than any of the online behemoths. Why? Because anyone capable of using a mouse can quickly and easily craft their own dungeon, toss it online, and let the masses have at it. Sure, there's the enormous single-player game, but building our own dungeon and jumping immediately into it blew us away. NWN is without doubt the must-have RPG of 2001.

Q: What Is the Next Breakout Hit à la THE SIMS? A: More SIMS.



Not surprisingly, the next title promising to rack up huge sales by combining groundbreaking gameplay with mass appeal is a SIMS game—but this one's online.

This time around, Maxis doesn't have to worry about trying to explain just what its game is about: With three million units sold and counting, THE SIMS is as much a pop cultural event as it is a game. THE SIMS ONLINE can only benefit from that, leveraging this growing franchise's familiarity while giving players the one thing they couldn't get in the original: real people. Until STAR WARS GALAXIES is released, THE SIMS ONLINE will be the Internet gaming equivalent of an 800-pound gorilla with chainsaw hands driving a nuclear steamroller. It won't be stopped. (You can read more about it in this month's cover story.)

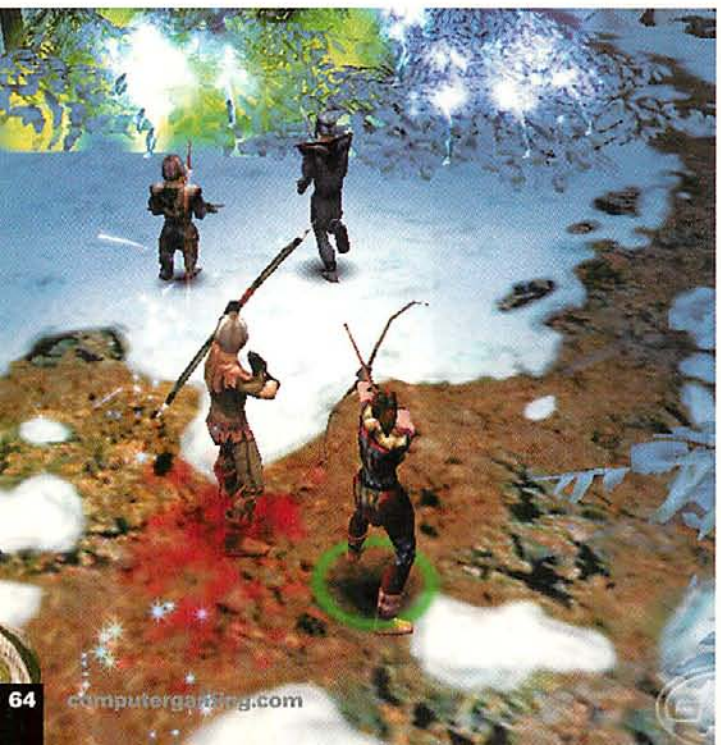
That said, we saw a number of other games that, while not exactly advancing the state of gaming art, seem certain to sell like crazy. These would be SID MEIER'S SIMGOLF and the "tycoon" games, each of them looking to capitalize on the runaway success of ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON. There's ZOO TYCOON, CAR TYCOON, and (incredibly) GOLF RESORT TYCOON. Apparently, slapping the word tycoon in a title is a free pass to $1 million in sales—look for KINGDOM UNDER FIRE TYCOON at a store near you.

Of the lot, our money is riding on two titles: ZOO TYCOON because it's easily understandable, should appeal to kids, and allows you to release the animals to terrorize visitors; and SID MEIER'S SIMGOLF, partly because it's a pretty good-looking game but mostly because the combination of Sid's name with the whole SIM phenomenon should make for a retail juggernaut.

Best of Show #8
Aliens vs. Predator 2

The moist darkness of Ridley Scott merges with the cold technology of James Cameron to create the look of Monolith's next game. The original game already had a good grasp of portraying each of its three sides, especially for multiplayer. What Monolith is doing this time is tweaking the sides (aliens automatically clinging to walls is now a toggle, for example) and applying its narrative skills. The previous game was a disjointed collection of three episodes, so now the team is working on telling a fluid, compelling story with three perspectives. And with LithTech 2.5, the look of the game will still cause your bladder to burst in surprise. Great looks, good story, fun ways to kill your buddies—keep an eye out for AvP2.





Best of Show #9
Dungeon Siege

Every time we see Gas Powered Games' DUNGEON SIEGE, it looks better—now we just need the developer to finish it. At E3 this year DUNGEON SIEGE proved itself to be what Chris Taylor has always claimed it would be: an easy, accessible, and beautiful 3D dungeon romp. To this day, no one has figured out how to out-DIABLO DIABLO, but Taylor, who conquered the RTS genre with his rogue hit TOTAL ANNIHILATION, may finally have done it.



Q: Who Won the Console War?
A: What's a console?



Everyone expected a lot out of E3 this year in the console space. You could have wandered the show floor for a week and still not seen everything, but we managed to wrap up the juiciest goods in the following rundown:

SONY

The one company without new hardware or surprises to show off, Sony still had a very successful show. Its announcement of a broadband/narrowband adapter for $40 answered the PS2 online question, and while Nintendo and Microsoft focused on how their consoles stack up as game machines, Sony was talking about partnerships with Internet mainstays like AOL and Cisco. Whether or not the PS2 becomes the center of home entertainment that Sony envisions, the company is certainly taking all the right steps to get there.

At the end of the day, though, it simply comes down to the games, and Sony's sprawling booth definitely had the goods. With promising new franchises like JAK AND DEXTER, DEVIL MAY CRY, and ICO joining bankable old favorites such as GT3, SILENT HILL 2, FINAL FANTASY X, and the unparalleled METAL GEAR SOLID 2, Sony was unrivaled in terms of breadth and quality of games on display.

NINTENDO

As the company with the games and characters most gamers grew up with, Nintendo had the buzz of the show. It had built up such anticipation for its GameCube games that even the bootup sequence got a roar from the crowd. The Luigi's Mansion and Pikmin demos appeared only decent in terms of visuals and gameplay, but the fact that they were Nintendo and Miyamoto games made them the talk of the show. ROGUE SQUADRON 2 was pretty much the same game we all know (and some love), but with a visual makeover so dramatic it brought many to tears. Nintendo's always done well with remakes, and while SMASH BROS. MELEE and WAVE RACE were huge news to all the Nintendo fans, people seemed underwhelmed by the lame looks and gameplay of KAMEO and STARFOX. In terms of online games, Nintendo is staying quiet until Spaceworld this fall, but Sega's PHANTASY STAR ONLINE VERSION 2 hints that the modem could be on the way right quick. And with ETERNAL DARKNESS the only adult-looking game in the booth, Nintendo didn't seem too eager to drop its "made for kids" image this year.

> **"ROGUE SQUADRON 2's visual makeover brought many to tears."**

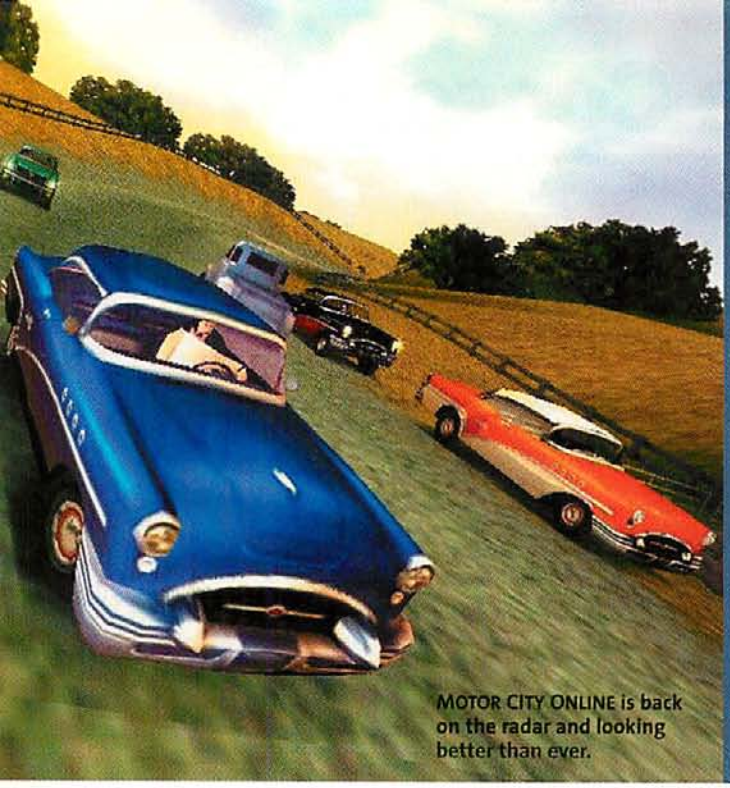
MICROSOFT

As a product of the company PC users love to hate and a newcomer in the console arena, Xbox had the steepest hill to climb. From all indications, Microsoft pegged the hardcore market, with titles like JET GRIND RADIO FUTURE, HALO, and MUNCH'S ODDYSEE pretty much guaranteeing core gamer support. The question is, how will Microsoft get from the core demographic to the mass market?

With third parties supporting the three newest consoles fairly equally, what will be important is exclusive games. Nintendo has Nintendo games and Sony has lots of good first- and third-party support, but what about Microsoft? Outside of a few sparks (like the excellent-looking driving game GOTHAM, DINO CRISIS 3, and GENMA ONIMUSHA from Capcom) the big-name exclusives just weren't there. What about the Xbox-only franchises from Square, Konami, and Namco? Considered in isolation, they add up to a not-bad E3 for Microsoft. But when you put them against Sony's excellent lineup of exclusives and the inevitable buzz for Nintendo, most observers agree that Microsoft has its work cut out for it. *—from the staff of Electronic Gaming Monthly*







MOTOR CITY ONLINE is back on the radar and looking better than ever.



MAFIA was among the cooler new titles on display at the G.O.D. Lot this year.



Live out your Monty Pythonesque fantasies in STRONGHOLD, a castle-building simulation.

Best of Show #10
World War II Online: Blitzkrieg

Two big themes at this year's E3 were massively multiplayer online worlds and games set in World War II. These themes come together in Strategy First's WORLD WAR II ONLINE, a virtual battlefield where hundreds of wargamers will meet and compete on land, air, and sea. It ain't the prettiest game, but when you spot that Tiger tank through the tall grass at 700 yards, it'll send shivers down your spine. WWII ONLINE looks highly intriguing, and it could revitalize wargames like COMBAT MISSION did last year—but this time on a much more massive scale.





Best of the Rest: 10 More E3 Hits

Civilization III
It may not be revolutionary, but a refinement of Sid's perfect CIV formula is all it takes to make our eyes glaze over and render us gibbering gaming grognards.

Unreal II
Strap a strong single-player story onto UNREAL TOURNAMENT's beefed-up engine and team AI, and you've got a fine-looking shooter. We especially like the CTF map on an asteroid belt.


Aquanox

Sigma
Relic's *Island of Dr. Moreau*–style RTS has continued to impress us every time we've seen it since its debut at last year's E3.

Motor City Online
Grease monkeys of the world, rejoice! Now you have your own online universe where you can race classic cars for money, glory, or pink slips without those pesky seatbelt laws.


Sigma

Mafia
It's got a slick 1930s-style setting and a neat racing minigame, but it's also the first game in which, as a rising mobster, you can use your bat on helpless old ladies.

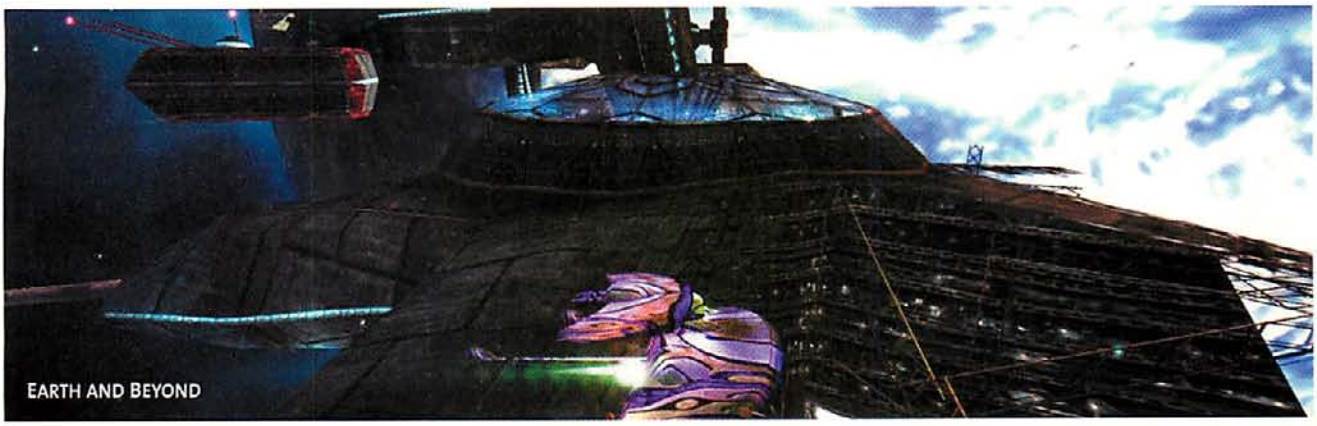
Aquanox
A gorgeous follow-up to ARCHIMEDEAN DYNASTY, AQUANOX maintains the original game's compelling story and pacing.

Rally Trophy
In case you missed the European rally-racing boom of the early '70s, you can now relive it in pure simulation fashion.

Hidden & Dangerous 2
H&D 2 looks to be one of the better World War II titles coming up. With its polished graphics and improved AI, this game should finally deliver on the promise of its predecessor.

Age of Wonders II
The heir apparent to MASTER OF MAGIC returns, with a more pointed emphasis on city management and a compelling new system of wizard towers. This was one of the best-looking fantasy games at the show.

Stronghold
A city-building game for the castle age from the makers of such other city-builders as CAESAR III and PHARAOH. As long as we get to fling diseased animals over the wall during sieges, we're happy.


EARTH AND BEYOND

And Finally, Disappointments

Star Wars: Galactic Battleground
Hovering X-Wings? Stormtroopers as tall as AT-ATs? Talk about sapping all the wonder and mysticism from the mythos and replacing it with puzzlement and ennui. Notice how the internally developed STAR WARS game is the one we're disappointed with?

Earth and Beyond
Of all the games we saw at E3, this massively multiplayer RPG was easily the limpest demo (even the SURVIVOR demo let us know what the game would be like). EARTH AND BEYOND left more than one editor scratching his head and wondering, "Why'd we put this on our cover, again?"

Max Payne
Okay, this could still turn out to be cool. The detail on the characters and the weapons and other environmental objects is undeniably stunning, and the concept of a game that plays like a hard-boiled detective movie is enticing. But we question just how well the slow motion "bullet time" mode will work and whether it will enhance the game or just be gimmicky. And those graphic-novel-inspired cut-scenes between levels are laden with more corn than polenta. We still have high hopes, but skepticism is starting to get the better of us.

Sovereign
You just try to deny the ambition these developers have. While you're at it, try sounding out the phrase "massively multiplayer online real-time strategy game." Sony Online has plenty of grand ideas about the home planet and the excursion planet battles, but the game looks more like something out of TIBERIAN SUN than like the next wave of real-time strategy. Can these guys ever fulfill any aspect of their dream?


MAX PAYNE

REVIEWS



The only thing lamer than this month's Reviews line-up is Hardware Editor Will O'Neal in a dress.

You Call This a Reviews Opener?

You should have seen the editorial planning meeting this month. When we realized what our spotlight review—usually a hotly anticipated or otherwise high-profile title—was, the response was pretty much unanimous: "Evil what?"

No TRIBES 2, no FALLOUT TACTICS, not even DUNE: EMPEROR (that's next month). No, we're stuck with naming EVIL ISLANDS the most exciting PC release this month. Just when we got done telling you that PC games aren't dead.

I'm not saying EVIL ISLANDS or any of the other games suck; some do and some don't. In fact, we liked EVIL ISLANDS well enough. But really, have gamers been waiting with baited breath for our AIR COMMAND 3.0 review? OK, maybe a few gamer/air-traffic controllers out there, but that's an extremely small slice of *CGW* readers (two or three thousand, tops).

Blame it on a traditionally soft market this time of year. Or maybe the distraction of E3. But the fact is, fewer high-profile games come out around this time, leaving us with a rather non-dazzling lineup. Fewer reviews means less to say in the reviews opener. Of course, some people think that's a bonus...

—Tom Price

AUGUST REVIEWS

GAME	RATING
Evil Islands	★★★½☆
X-COM Enforcer	★★☆☆☆
Fly! II	★★☆☆☆
Cossacks: European Wars	★★★½☆
The Ward	★★☆☆☆
Star Trek: Voyager Elite Force expansion pack	★★☆☆☆
Political Tycoon	★★☆☆☆
Air Command 3.0	★★½☆☆
Flanker 2.5	★★★★☆
Rune: Halls of Valhalla	★★☆☆☆
Robot Arena	★★★☆☆
Evil Dead: Hail to the King	★☆☆☆☆
NHRA Drag Racing	★★★☆☆

HOW DO WE RATE? We review only finished games — no betas, no patches.

★★★★★



OUTSTANDING The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

★★★★☆



VERY GOOD Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

★★★☆☆



AVERAGE Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

★★☆☆☆



WEAK Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone.

★☆☆☆☆



ABYSMAL The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

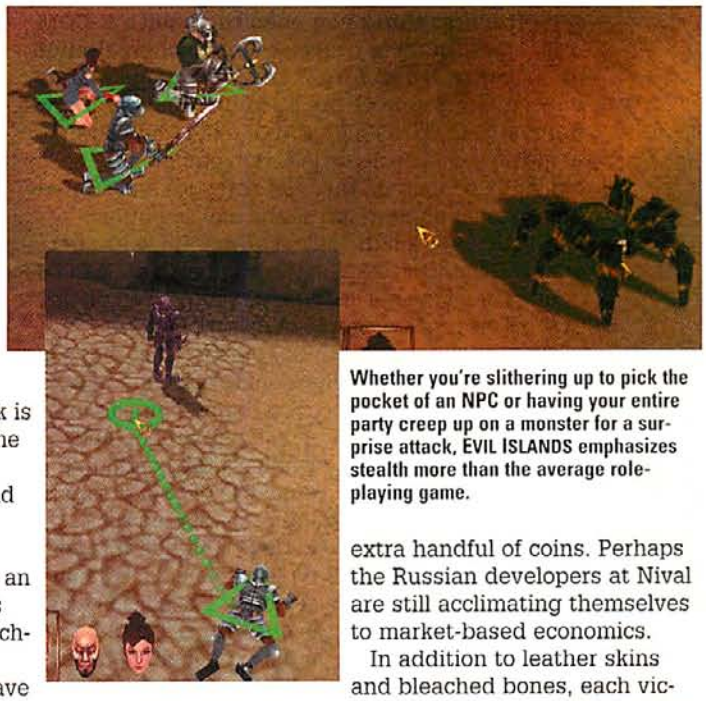
EVIL ISLANDS puts a new coat of paint on a worn-out premise

The Good Kind of Evil

You wake up alone on an island. You don't remember who you are, where you are, how you got there, or where you left your shirt. Not exactly new ground for a role-playing game. Sadly, neither is poor voice acting. The good news is, if you can forgive EVIL ISLANDS for these transgressions, the game will more than make up for them with compelling quests, an intriguing skill system, and a masterful palette of scenery and settings.

This is not an arcade shooter or a duelist arena. EVIL ISLANDS is a creep-along, sneak-around, lay-in-wait game that will test your patience as well as your mettle. The drawback is that you will spend the majority of your time crawling on knees and elbows at a snail's pace—nail-biting fun when you're evading an angry ogre; a tedious chore when you're inching toward an objective that lies three zones away. The quests begin with the standard "save us from the hairy things" plea and gradually increase in both difficulty and intrigue. When you finally reach your destination and are able to sink a life-sapping backstab into the enemy or sneak up and steal a magic bauble from its pouch, the experience is almost always thrilling. After that, you simply collect your loot and crawl back to the village to discover more about your mysterious origin and how to get back home to cash in your spoils.

EVIL ISLANDS
reviewed by Arcadian Del Sol



Whether you're slithering up to pick the pocket of an NPC or having your entire party creep up on a monster for a surprise attack, EVIL ISLANDS emphasizes stealth more than the average role-playing game.

Freedom From a Class-Based Society

The first thing you'll learn upon selling your piles of leather and bone is that you are poor. While frustrating at first, this problem is easily remedied if you carefully sweep up after every battle. By the time you complete the first half of the game, you will find yourself with more wealth than you know what to do with. Alternatively, you can save your bits of leather and stone, and in conjunction with the proper blueprints you can create your own weapons and armor. But with the cost of constructing items being only marginally less than the cost of purchasing them up front, you'll most likely want to save yourself the hassle and spend the extra handful of coins. Perhaps the Russian developers at Nival are still acclimating themselves to market-based economics.

In addition to leather skins and bleached bones, each victory earns you a portion of experience in the form of points you can use to raise your basic statistics and improve your complement of skills. Using the shopkeeper interface in the village, you can train your character in any of the available skills. There are no class restrictions here. There are no "Oh, if only I'd made a Cleric" lamentations in EVIL ISLANDS. If you find your party has insufficient healing magic, you simply earmark a portion of experience points to that school of magic. If you prefer the long-distance relationship of archery over the intimacy of toe-to-toe pugilism, then drop a few hundred points into archery. Setting aside the tenets of standard role-playing, Nival decided it was more important to let you have fun your way than to straitjacket you with restrictive role-playing traditions. Good for them.

Non-Ending on a Good Note

Every so often, a classic story is remade, and all too often the results are disappointing. EVIL ISLANDS is another in a long line of games to use the same dog-eared script, but it redeems itself with entertaining characters, intricate subplots, and an attractive landscape. While the ending might seem an insufficient reward for the journey (EVIL ISLANDS 2 is all but promised in the final cut-scenes), the journey itself is its own reward. EVIL ISLANDS is not what I would call immersive, but it is a challenging game that earns every dollar spent on it. CGW

CGW RATED



PROS
Flexible role-playing system supported by great art, varied gameplay, and cool characters.

CONS
Does humankind really need another amnesia plot with an unsatisfying, sequel set-up ending?

Requirements: Pentium-II 300, 64MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 400, 128MB RAM. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer:** LAN, Internet (2–6 players).

Publisher: Fishtank Interactive • Developer: Nival Interactive • $40 • www.evil-islands.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; blood and violence.

First cattle mutilation, now this

Aliens Abduct X-COM Franchise!

X-COM: ENFORCER

reviewed by Mark Asher

The first thing you need to do with X-COM ENFORCER is practice some Ethereal mind control, and forget that this game claims descent from one of the all-time great strategy games, X-COM. X-COM ENFORCER is X-COM in name only, a console-style action game that demands no more in the way of tactics and strategy than remembering to press the mouse button a zillion times to kill the zillion aliens. Once you get over X-COM ENFORCER not really being an X-COM game, it's enjoyable enough, although even on its own terms it has a couple of glaring faults.

ENFORCER begins with the premise that the world is being overrun with aliens, and you, the Enforcer, are humanity's last hope. You're not a human in this game, but a robot, and you have the continuing guidance of your creator, Professor Standard. Professor Standard is your typical comic-book genius scientist. He looks like an overgrown Q-Tip that's sprouted arms and legs and he constantly praises and nags you as play: "Go Enforcer!" "This way Enforcer!" Unfortunately, you're not allowed to return to base and kill Professor Standard.

The game is powered by the UNREAL TOURNAMENT engine and looks great. It's really cool to see Sectoids and Snakemen rendered in 3D, and it makes me wonder how much fun a more serious X-COM game might have been. I also wonder if ENFORCER isn't the result of a game company, having paid for an expensive game-engine license for a game that didn't materialize (X-COM ALLIANCE), opting to use it instead in another game.

ENFORCER has more than 30 levels of frantic action. The gameplay is simple: Run around, grab power-ups (health, new weapons, damage modifiers, and so on), and kill every freakin' alien you see. ENFORCER never shifts speeds; it's pedal-to-the-metal action from start to finish. Aliens continually spawn from monster generators, called transporters. Kill the aliens, destroy the transporters, and that's ENFORCER. Oh, some levels might have different goals, such as rescuing the humans, or rescuing the humans *and* killing the boss creature, but the action's essentially the same in every mission.

This is one of the chief problems with ENFORCER: There's absolutely no variety in the gameplay. Sure, the scenery changes and you see different aliens and bosses as you progress, but one level is just like the last in terms of how you play. There's never a change of pace—a sneaky mission to provide contrast to the fast-paced ones, or just a few powerful creatures that require some tricky mouse-work to defeat to provide contrast with the hordes you typically have to kill.



SSSSSSSSUUUUUUUPER, XCOM ENFORCER! If you can get past the silly blatherings of the Professor, the run-and-gun arcade action can be fun at times.

It doesn't help that you can't hold more than one weapon. The ability to switch weapons might have resulted in some interesting tactical options—freeze gun 'em and then blast 'em with a shotgun while they're frozen, for example.

The other problem with ENFORCER is that it's too easy. Veteran gamers will be able to blow through it in 10 to 15 hours. There's an endless supply of respawning power-ups, so you really don't even need to aim. You can run and shoot and never run out of ammo because that new weapon will spawn in front of you every few seconds.

ENFORCER does include multiplayer options, but the cooperative mode isn't any different from the single-player game, except that it's perhaps easier. Deathmatch mode is fun, but it's hard to find players, and even then it's a deathmatch-lite experience.

Ultimately, ENFORCER falls short on all counts. It's certainly not the X-COM we wanted, but even forgiving that, it's not a great action game either. It needs more variety and better pacing, and it needs to be more challenging. Let's hope Infogrames has more ambitious plans for the X-COM license in the future. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

It's cool to see 3D Sectoids; it has that straightforward, all-action feel.

CONS

The action becomes boring and repetitive; it's not a true X-COM game.

Requirements: Windows 95/98, DirectX 7, Pentium 233 MMX, 32MB RAM, 500MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300, 64MB RAM, 510MB hard drive space, 8X CD-ROM, 4MB SVGA video card. **3D Support:** Direct3D/Open GL **Multiplayer:** LAN, TCP/IP.

Publisher: Infogrames • Developer: Microprose • $40 • www.xcomenforcer.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; animated blood, gore, and violence.

FLY! II has shipped—cable modem not included

Shoo Fly!

FLY! II is this year's poster child for programs shoved out the door before completion—publisher Gathering of Developers not only shipped FLY! II with bugs and missing features, it even left out most of the manual. The shame of it all is that the finished parts are quite good, and developer Terminal Reality has been very quick to post patches and missing terrain data.

FLY! II is the sequel to FLY!2K, and while it retains the same basic look, feel, and aircraft list, much of the foundation has been changed. Aircraft and most of the other add-ons for the original FLY! games won't work with FLY! II.

The manual is a mere 38-page pamphlet, down from 288 pages for FLY!2K. "Not only does this let us pass the savings in printing and production costs on to you," the pamphlet claims (despite the program's $45 street price), "it allows us to eliminate printing delays so we can provide you with a manual that's totally up-to-date and current with the software version you receive"—an ironic statement given the sim's unfinished feel and the fact that only the first couple of unedited chapters were available on the website at press time.

FLY! II
reviewed by Denny Atkin

FLY! II comes on a single CD, compared with FLY!2K's three discs. And no, Terminal Reality didn't develop a miraculous new compression scheme. FLY! II ships without any hi-res TerraScene cities, and with sectional charts for only 11 cities. These are slowly being made available for downloading, but the files are huge: The New York scenery is 165MB, and even the missing sectional map packs can be up to 15MB each.

The aircraft range from a single-engine prop plane to a business jet. Most likely due to licensing issues, many have been renamed. The Hawker jet, for instance, is now a Peregrine. The instrument panels are extremely detailed, and almost every switch is functional. Among the new craft is the Bell 407 helicopter, which is quite a challenge to fly. And it's in flight that FLY II excels—no other sim I've flown has captured so well the feeling of flying in a real atmosphere, where small bumps and wind changes occur even in smooth air.

The program's scenery will elicit a mixture of awe and disappointment. Taking off from Burlington, Vermont, the mountain elevations all look great, and coastline detail around Lake Champlain seems remarkably accurate. City textures are in the right places, and are nicely lit at night. But Plattsburgh International Airport has apparently been transplanted across the lake from New York—many miles from where it should be. So much for practicing VFR flight. Pilots wanting to fly from their home bases will be disappointed to find some smaller fields missing. Also AWOL are roads and rivers. An easy-to-use 3D terrain editor does let you add buildings and other objects.

The graphics engine looks better than FLY!2K's, with a greater viewing distance, dramatically improved weather effects, more accurate elevation, beautiful skies, and sharper terrain and water textures. There are some driver problems, however. I got smooth frame rates on a Pentium-III 700 with a Radeon card, but graphics on a Pentium-III 1000 with a GeForce2 Ultra were fairly jerky.

Should you buy FLY! II? With the patches and additional downloads, it's a far better sim than it is out of the box. But unless you have a high-speed Internet connection, you're looking at many long nights of downloading before you'll have all the promised features installed—more than a half-gigabyte of files had been posted at press time. CGW



QUAKE OR FLOOD? What natural disaster knocked half of San Francisco's buildings into the bay?



INSTRUMENTAL TUNE The instrument panel is deadly realistic; you'll have to download the manual to make sense of it.

CGW RATED

PROS
Fantastic flight dynamics, great for instrument flight; terrain and weather look stunning.

CONS
Numerous small bugs; huge downloads needed to add missing features; objects misplaced on terrain.

Requirements: Pentium-II 333, 64MB RAM, 1.2GB hard drive space, 16MB 3D card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-III 500, 128MB RAM, 1.6GB hard drive space, 32MB 3D card. **3D Support:** DirectX **Multiplayer:** Internet (TCP/IP) on Terminal Reality's server.

Publisher: Gathering of Developers • Developer: Terminal Reality • $45 • www.iflytri.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

COSSACKS delivers big battles and bigger frustrations

An AGE, Writ Large

COSSACKS: EUROPEAN WARS

reviewed by Loyd Case



Frederick II of Prussia clashes with the Russian army at Kunersdorf in one of the multiplayer historical battles. This gives you an idea of how huge COSSACKS' battles can be.



Each of the 16 nationalities will eventually have access to the Montgolfier technology advance, which allows the launching of a balloon to reveal the entire map.

During the Thirty Years War, an unsuccessful siege meant the besieger couldn't return for at least two years. It took that long for local food supplies, forage, and wood to be replenished. COSSACKS reflects the real cost of warfare in 17th- and 18th-century Europe: Maintaining enormous numbers of military units requires a constant stream of resources. The delicate balance of these resources keeps you on edge—nothing quite matches the shock you feel when your mercenaries go on the rampage and start slaughtering your own units because they're not being paid. Toss in a surprisingly aggressive AI, and COSSACKS makes for lots of late nights in front of the PC.

Unlike the decorative formations in AGE OF KINGS, formations in COSSACKS are essential to managing the huge scale of the game. Infantry can form columns, lines, or squares, as was common in the 18th century. The key to managing formations is the officer unit—one officer can manage formations of up to 196 units of a single infantry type. Artillery formations don't require an officer, but work similarly. You can create batteries of immense size, which can pummel even high-strength structures into gravel in short order. There's nothing quite as impressive as watching a triple rank of 96 improved musketeers ripple-fire an advancing column to shreds.

There are no killer units; trying to rush any one type of unit against AI—or worse, a savvy human player—at the tough setting will result in your head being handed back to you on a platter. Speaking of the AI, it's adept at flanking maneuvers and popping up where you're the weakest.

At its core, COSSACKS is very much a real-time strategy game. The key to victory is to harass enemy-owned mines constantly, inhibiting your enemy's ability to create new units. Just a few cavalrymen can capture mines and force your opponent to react. As the game progresses, you can permanently acquire enemy mines with larger forces, but sacrificing a few hussars to take away mines for a short time keeps the enemy off balance.

Unfortunately, COSSACKS has some frustrating shortcomings that can pull you out of the game and spoil the experience. The worst is the mouse action. As the gameworld gets complex, with hundreds of units going about their business, selection gets very difficult because mouse clicks *do not take*. You can click on a unit once, twice, 10 times, and it still won't be selected. Worse, the scroll speed seems to be tied to the game-speed setting. When the game is set to a very slow speed, the screen scrolls like Windows on an aging 286. These frustrations seem minor early on, but by midgame, when you're typically juggling two or three battles and everyone has hundreds of units, it's almost a game killer.

In addition, COSSACKS' weak campaigns fall into the RTS trap of employing puzzles with an optimal path that you must seek through trial and error. Playing skirmish games or the single-map scenarios will give you a much better single-player experience.

Multiplayer is also problematic. Because of the scope of the game, the designers thoughtfully included a save feature for multiplayer. However, about half the time when you load a multiplayer saved game, somebody instantly wins, with all the others instantly losing. No matter what the pattern of saves or game loads, this random auto-win "feature" instantly ends the game.

COSSACKS at its best is absorbing, immensely fun, and breathtaking in scope. At its worst, it makes you want to pound your mouse into powder. If the game's problems get fixed in a patch, buy it; otherwise, watch over someone else's shoulder. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Unit variety; superb combat system; huge battles.

CONS

Nonfunctional mouse clicks; incredibly slow scrolling; goofy scripted campaigns.

Requirements: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 200MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 233, 64MB RAM. **3D Support:** None **Multiplayer:** Internet, LAN (2–7 players).

Publisher: Strategy First • Developer: CDV • $45 • www.cossacks.com • ESRB Rating: Teen; blood, violence.

THE WARD's moon-based gameplay isn't worth the trip

Total Eclipse of the Fun

I have to admit: I tend to root for underfunded, understaffed, and underhyped games from across the pond. And Fragile Bits' THE WARD does at times show promise with some decent puzzles, cool tunes, and an interesting story line. But myriad bugs, slooooow gameplay, and too many slider and uninteresting puzzles quickly soured my apologist mindset. Combining the off-Earth setting of LucasArts' THE DIG with the subterfuge of Bungie's MARATHON, THE WARD just can't compete. As a matter of fact, THE WARD falls short in almost every category except the story, which might hold the interest of diehard sci-fi fans.



Bad graphics, blocky thought balloons, and another inventory puzzle hampered by a too-small inventory screen—being an alien hero sucks.

THE WARD
reviewed by Raphael Liberatore

Lo-Fi Sci-Fi

You play as astronaut David Walker, sent to the moon to survey some seismic activity. During the trip, marauding aliens capture you and kill your crew. Awakening in a hospital, you discover aliens in nearby beds and a mysterious, unremoveable necklace around your neck. It's your task to discover what is going on.

THE WARD plays out in three phases, in the alien space station, in a Martian penal colony, and in the alien ship. You eventually figure out that you are the aliens' hero, known as the Ward, and are destined to help good aliens fight bad aliens intent on destroying the Earth. Everything seems doable until you hit the second phase of the game.

Dark Side of the Moon

Though THE WARD offers an interesting story with some logical inventory puzzles, in-game minutiae eventually derail the title. Illogically placed slider puzzles pop up at inappropriate times, slowing down gameplay without rhyme or reason. Many of the game's other puzzles rely on memory rather than actual puzzle solving. You'll constantly need to track locations and sequences, generally with few or no clues to help you, in order to make painfully incremental game progress. Further bogging you down, you'll have to talk to every single character on the Mars base, but hunting them down is almost impossible. Finding the right person takes forever because everyone's either moving at ramming speed or teleporting away, while you saunter along at a frustratingly slow pace. Time-based sequences are particularly annoying because you'll keep moving at this slow pace, as if nothing important were happening, and then—surprise!—die because you run out time. What's more frustrating is that everyone but your character seems to understand the urgency of the given situation and moves like lightning.



One of THE WARD's many slider-style puzzles. Didn't these things go out with THE ELEVENTH HOUR?

THE WARD's simple 2D/3D mouse-driven interface is nicely laid out, but its lack of technical presentation dates it compared with modern adventure games like RETURN TO MONKEY ISLAND and MYST III. Simply put, graphics and audio resemble games from the early '90s. Characters lack detail and at times seem incomplete. Dialogue boxes, not voice acting, carry the entire conversational load. And cut-scenes are unintenionally hilarious, sounding at times like they were created by a bunch of junior high school kids. On the positive side, the in-game music is nice and the save-game feature is intuitive—when it doesn't crash.

It's an underwhelming package to say the least. Retailing at less than $20, THE WARD *may* be worth it if you're an adventure game fan who's thin on games and fat on time. But given a choice, I'd rather replay GRIM FANDANGO. CGW

CGW RATED



PROS
Intriguing story; some interesting puzzles.

CONS
Outdated graphics; slider puzzle overkill; text-only dialogue.

Requirements: Pentium-II 133, 32MB RAM, 130MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300, 96MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer:** None

Publisher: On Deck Interactive/Gathering of Developers • Developer: Fragile Bits • $20 • www.theward.com • ESRB Rating: Teen (13+); animated violence.

RUNE: HALLS OF VALHALLA



While the original RUNE focused on a single-player Viking adventure with limited multiplayer support, the expansion pack, RUNE: HOV, is strictly a multiplayer upgrade.

★★½☆☆

Rather than limiting the developers, this focus on multiplayer actually lets them circumvent most of the problems that plagued RUNE. Gone are the weak enemies, faulty scripted events, and tired adventure game clichés. Replacing them are more than thirty new maps, two new types of gameplay, a multitude of new skins, and some of the toughest opponents ever to lay hands on an axe.

In addition to the familiar Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch games, two new options are available: Arena and Headball. Arena is a "king of the hill"-style game, where challengers watch matches while waiting for their chance to dethrone the current champion. The other new game, Headball, is enough to prime Senator Lieberman for an aneurysm. Not surprisingly, it plays like it sounds. You cleave the head from your opponent, pick it up, and toss it into a goal. Now that's a sport fit for a Viking!

Since HOV uses a variant of the UNREAL TOURNAMENT game engine, finding a game on a low ping server and connecting to it is painless, and despite sparse documentation, even a complete novice should be slicing and dicing in no time. The use of a proven engine also allows for user mods, many of which are quite well done. In fact, seven of the included HOV maps are contest winners from the RUNE community. And—though it's not included on the retail disk—an interesting variant of Headball called Sarkball (think hockey with really wicked sticks, no penalty box, and a head for a puck) has already been posted.

One huge omission in HOV is the lack of bots to hone your skills before facing off against some joker named 'Htk'rtfg who plays 24/7. Even more disappointing, extended gameplay can get repetitive.

Other notable negatives include the typical problems associated with Internet gaming such as lag, dweebs, and a few minor bugs. Still, while HOV doesn't offer enough to convert those who passed on RUNE the first time, those currently enjoying RUNE multiplayer probably won't be disappointed.

—Joe "Biter" Bailey

Genre: Action • **Publisher:** Gathering Of Developers • **Developer:** Humanhead • $20 • www.runegame.com • **ESRB Rating:** Mature; blood, gore, and violence.

EVIL DEAD: HAIL TO THE KING





Horrible controls. Chunky graphics. Fairly unstable PC support. Excellent voice acting. Usually, it's all the other way around. Here, Bruce Campbell actually puts in a great performance. Yet for every perfect utterance of "Groovy," out comes another damning element from the game itself.

★☆☆☆☆

EVIL DEAD: HAIL TO THE KING can best be described by referring to its own control scheme: three buttons to operate the chainsaw, one button to taunt enemies, and a nearly ubiquitous use key. When was the last time you saw a game with a taunt button that had no multiplayer support whatsoever?

It just never gets any better. You run around, and find pages of the Necronomicon while fighting undead monsters that either get stuck on objects, or just plain vanish from the screen (and they're still able to attack you, no less).

Normally, I'd go ahead and recommend a game based on a cult-beloved background—to those who are rabidly passionate about it. Unfortunately, EVIL DEAD just isn't worth it, even if you are the biggest EVIL DEAD fan in the universe.

Genre: Action • **Publisher:** THQ • **Developer:** Heavy Iron Studios • $40 • www.evildeadgame.com • **ESRB Rating:** Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.

STAR TREK: VOYAGER ELITE FORCE EXPANSION PACK

As thrilling as the name sounds...(insert sarcastic "ba-dup-bum" here), you're not getting much despite what appears to be an impressive features list.

★★☆☆☆

The best thing about this expansion pack is the multiplayer, and brother, that's not saying much. In fact, you may even end up sullied from your original ELITE FORCE experience because of the shallowness of these single-player levels.

Here's what's offered, and what you're really getting in single-player:

- Exploring the Voyager isn't *nearly* as enjoyable as it sounds. Armed with your tricorder, the scavenger hunt to find weapons and—I kid you not—action figures of the crew members is the translucent type of gaming I was surprised to see, since the original game was so good. The slightly humorous "15th Deck" ending doesn't fill the void left from all that hall wandering. A bright spot is the library files: They hold the history of space travel, the warp core, the roots of the Federation, and other geek facts. One of the features touted in the press release was "... players can perform complex tasks like initiating Voyager's self-destruct sequence..." This involves going to the bridge and pushing a big red button, folks.
- The dialog pack that includes Jeri Ryan's (Seven of Nine) real voice is free online, so don't get too worked up over this, either. You only see her once in the expansion anyway, so get over it.
- The holodeck missions overall seemed like an afterthought, but what made me particularly sore was the missed opportunity with the black and white "Captain Proton" mission. Its kitschy 1950s sci-fi theme was wasted on bad level design and a distinct lack of "atmosphere"; definitely a good idea squandered.



The multiplayer really doesn't add much either. One of the two types of gameplay is "Specialties Mode." It's "TEAM FORTRESS with phasers": It enables you to play as technician, heavy weapons expert, sniper, medic, demolitions, and infiltrator—each with its unique abilities and strengths. That's actually *not* as fun as it sounds. You get over 21 new maps, which *might* make it worthwhile for the die-hards, and the twelve new models (including the black and white models from the "Captain Proton" level) may catch your eye. But even after all that, you'll probably feel that the cardboard cutout of Scott Bakula you passed on to get this game may not have been a lesser option after all.

—Jason Babler

Genre: Action • **Publisher:** Activision • **Developer:** Raven Software • $20 • www.ravensoft.com/eliteforce/ • **ESRB Rating:** Teen

POLITICAL TYCOON

The truth about POLITICAL TYCOON is ugly. It represents a revolting, unfair, and all-too-real aspect of the gaming industry.

The truth about POLITICAL TYCOON is that it's not a tycoon game at all. Not in the spirit of ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON or RAILROAD TYCOON. Formerly named ECONOMIC WAR in Europe, Monte Cristo decided to rename it in North America because, well, there's a big trend around tycoon games right now. That's what you call expert marketing; the end result will most certainly be extra sales figures for the game. Fair enough—it worked for Havas Interactive in 1998 when their mediocre TITANIC: ADVENTURE OUT OF TIME rode Leonardo DiCaprio's coattails to become the sixth best-selling game of that year.

★★☆☆☆

But the problem is, POLITICAL TYCOON—which conjures up notions of running a campaign election, dealing with foreign crises, or extinguishing the latest sex scandal—is a grossly misleading title.

While you are able to set up embassies in other nations, create trade and military alliances, and even blackmail prime ministers, the over-arching goals of the game largely involve economic power, natural resources, and infrastructure development. Politics are largely incidental to these goals.

Compounding this problem, the gameplay is unfocused and vague. The first few missions you win, you won't understand how or why or even what happened. But the game's likeable character and tone, combined with the constant and overwhelming rate of decision-making, will keep you playing, optimistically searching for that magical a-ha moment—frequently present in real tycoon games—when everything becomes clear.

Unfortunately, that never happens. POLITICAL TYCOON never overcomes one of the cardinal sins of gaming: You don't ever truly figure out why or what you're supposed to accomplish. That's reason enough to steer clear of this one. *—George Jones*

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Monte Cristo Games • $20
www.montecristogames.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone; mild violence.

FLANKER 2.5

The half-point bump in the name and the availability of a free upgrade for current FLANKER 2.0 owners belies the improvements in FLANKER 2.5. Earlier versions of this hardcore flight sim had very realistic flight models and ultra-detailed systems, but peculiar AI pilots and static naval units hurt the suspension of disbelief. The FLANKER 2.5 upgrade (available bundled with FLANKER 2.0 at Electronics Boutique, or as a free update for FLANKER 2.0 online) offers much more realistic AI and tactics, giving combat a whole new feel. Add a new flyable fighter and over 150 improvements and bug fixes, and this good sim becomes great.

★★★★☆

The most significant addition is the flyable MiG-29K Fulcrum, the naval variant of the famed Russian fighter. The Fulcrum handles very differently than the Flanker. It's much easier to black out when maneuvering, and various new weapons systems demand new tactics. (Napalm, anyone?) Flanker veterans will be going back to flight school before they master this one.

The MiG also features a whole new cockpit to learn. The 3D virtual cockpits here are among the best seen yet in a jet sim, even sporting moving controls. Faster panning helps when using the helmet-mounted heads-up display in the heat of combat.

Aircraft now use group tactics instead of the silly one-at-a-time attacks seen in FLANKER 2.0. That means, of course, that the combat's even tougher here. But the ultimate challenge is probe-and-drogue aerial refueling. The terrain engine remains the same, but special effects are beefed up. There are numerous small but impressive tweaks: You can take off and land from roads, belly land, and give commands to wingmen, for instance.





Alas, there are some glitches. You can now choose to run the interface on a standard Windows screen, but that forces the sim into a window, and causes mouse pointer glitches. On some video cards, the map flashes wildly in the mission editor, a problem that can be solved by changing interface modes. There are still texture glitches when flying low. And missile evasion desperately needs to be adjustable—the deadly accuracy of missiles in this game is sure to frustrate newbies and experts alike.

Despite a series of well-done training missions and an instant-action mode, FLANKER 2.5 is for the intense sim fan. These aren't point-and-shoot planes—you'll need reading and practice to master these aircraft, and the Russian instruments and radar just make it all the more complicated. But why fly if there is no sense of accomplishment, Comrade?
—Denny Atkin

Genre: Simulation • **Publisher:** SSI • **Developer:** The Fighter Collection • **$20 (free downloadable upgrade for FLANKER 2.0 owners)** • **www.flanker2.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone; animated violence.

ROBOT ARENA

If you've ever seen the show *Battle Bots* on Comedy Central, where amateur engineers build remote-controlled robots out of pick-axes and salad bowls and then engage them in mortal combat, then you get the basic premise behind ROBOT ARENA.

★★★☆☆

What ROBOT ARENA has over *Battle Bots* is the sheer volume of weaponry you can mount onto your little robot chassis. I'm talking spinning saw blades, compressed-air harpoons, swinging hatchets, and so forth.

Playing through a progressive championship against increasingly well equipped (although quite unskilled) AI opponents rewards you with money to buy more parts (including batteries, signal jammers, and other accessories) to build up your machine. Since it doesn't take much time or effort to do this, before you know it you'll have an indestructible machine to easily finish off the rest of the computer opponents.

It's a guilty pleasure, but there's not enough gameplay to carry it past a really short lifespan.
—Tom Price

Genre: Action • **Publisher:** WizardWorks • **Developer:** Gabriel Interactive • **$22** • **www.wizardworks.com/robot.html** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone; robot violence.

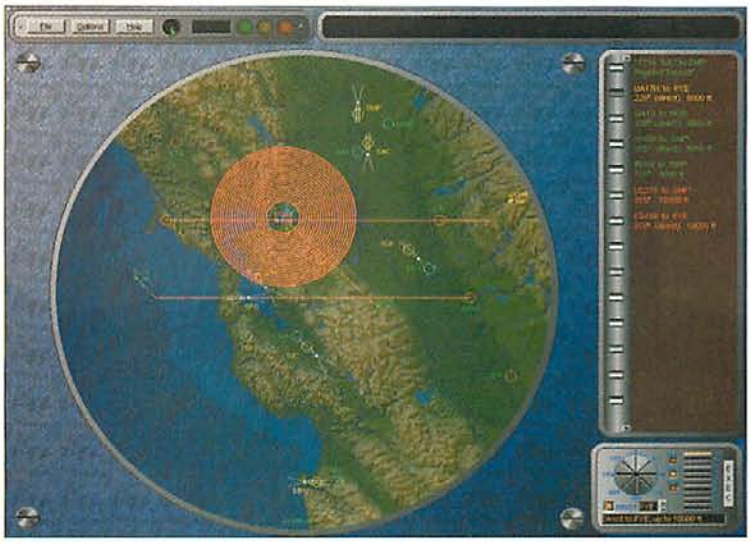
AIR COMMAND 3.0

In the ultimate video game, real-life air traffic controllers stare at a screen filled with lines, numbers, and dots, controlling blips that represent airplanes filled with people. Mistakes result in more than a low score, and there's no pause button.

AIR COMMAND 3.0 lets you experience all of the stress of the job, without the consequences. It makes no pretense of being a hardcore accurate simulation of life in the tower, instead taking the route of simplification in the name of fun. You choose one of 10 airport regions, such as LAX, Chicago O'Hare, or Amsterdam (an airport editor allows you to create more). Select difficulty options such as clouds on your radar, pilot miscommunications, and the number of aircraft. Then, sit back and watch the radar screen fill with aircraft.

★★½☆☆

Gameplay is as simple as it sounds. A plane enters your airspace, displaying a desired destination. You give the aircraft the course, speed, and altitude you determine to be the quickest and safest. For VOR hand-offs you simply ensure that the plane arrives at the specified transmitting shack at a required altitude.



Landings require guiding the plane to a perfect lineup on the receiving airport's runway. You gain points for getting planes where they need to be with the fewest instructions. You lose points for missed landings and hand-offs. You also lose points for allowing planes to fly too close to each other, and if you permit the ultimate blunder—a mid-air collision—the game ends. The action starts slowly and quickly builds in intensity, the screen filling with air traffic, all blithely trusting that you'll get them home quickly and without a nasty mid-air collision.

The sense of dealing with real aircraft is enhanced by the vocal radio replies from the pilots, as well as the occasional "What the hell are they thinking down there?!?" when you screw up. It would be a nice touch if there were random emergencies; currently the only emergencies are those you create by putting two planes in the same airspace.

AIR COMMAND 3.0 won't win any awards or be the game that you use to show off your new 2GHz Pentium 4. But it does provide simple, challenging gameplay —even if a few hours spent playing the game causes you to take the bus on your next trip. *—Jeff Lackey*

Genre: Strategy • **Publisher:** Shrapnel Games • **Developer:** Joe's Games • $35
www.shrapnelgames.com • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

NHRA DRAG RACING 2

Drag racing is easily the most exciting four seconds in motor sports—a blast of unrestrained, chest-rattling, internal combustion that could cause Henry Ford to make an Edsel in his shorts. Such a vulgar display of power would be difficult for anyone to recreate in a computer game, but moto1.net's NHRA DRAG RACING 2—despite its valiant attempt at being a hardcore simulation—falls short of putting the gamer behind the wheel of a top fuel dragster or funny car. And failing to create a realistic environment is a sim cardinal sin. The graphics engine needs some serious work. Simply using textures lifted from actual photographs of the car's parts isn't good enough, and the severe clipping problems don't help. Another beef I have is that the tires don't change dimensions. If you ever watch the drags in slow motion (a missing option that mars an otherwise good replay mode), the rear tires severely distort, shrinking in width while increasing in diameter. It's a small detail, but drag fans will notice it.

★★★☆☆

The developers did a lot to make this feel like a hardcore simulation, but I can't really say I enjoyed the game, because it didn't make me feel like I was down at the strip. If moto1.net can polish the engine and beef up the sound, the next installment in this series could be as indispensable for race fans as the Papyrus games. But not yet. *—Tom Price*

Genre: Racing • **Publisher:** moto1.net • **Developer:** Staccato • $20 • www.moto1.net • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

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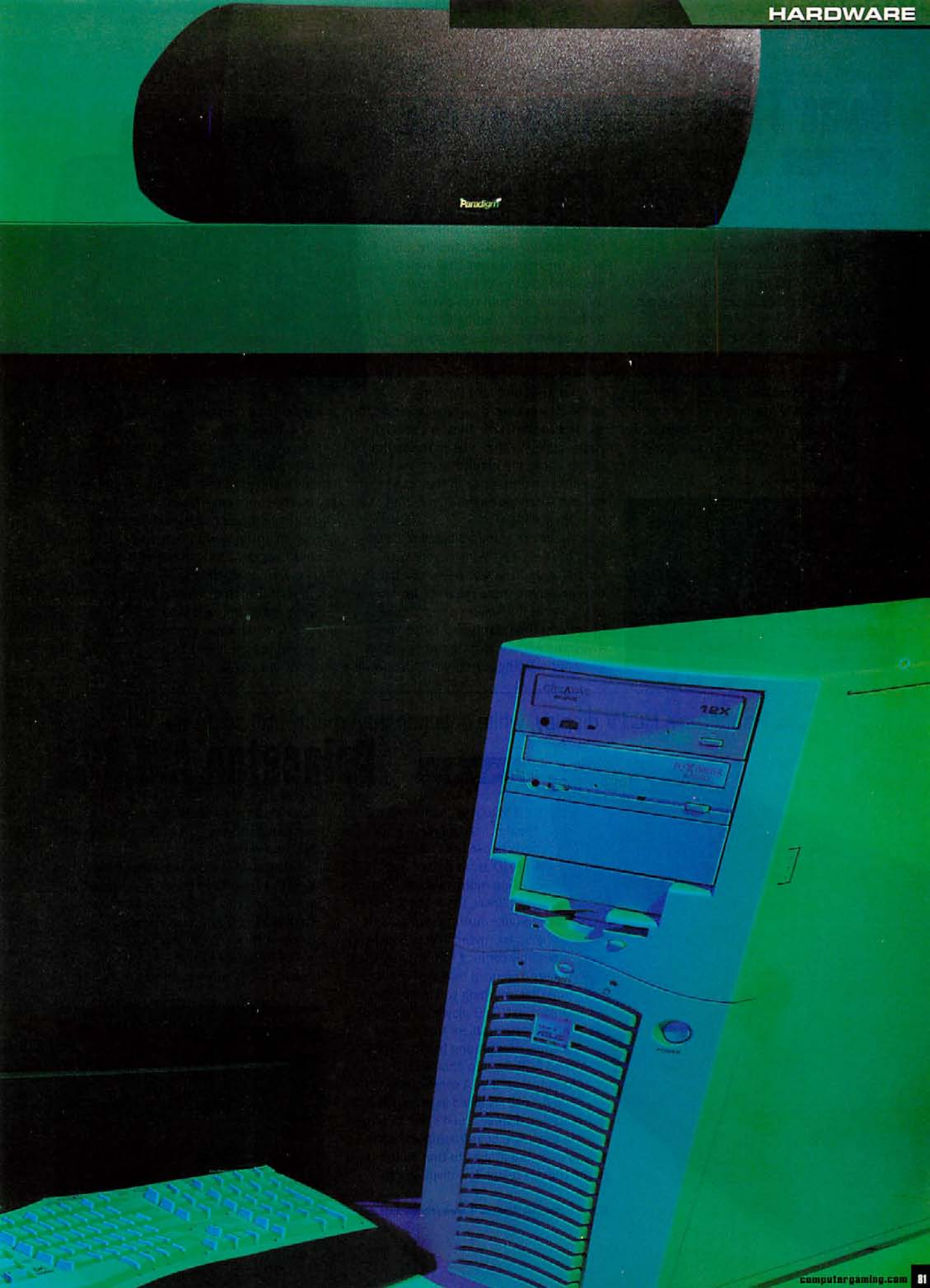
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Photography by Hayden Houser

Home Theater

Computer manufacturers have been trying for years to get people to put their computers in their living rooms or dens. While an overwhelming lack of consumer interest has led Gateway, for example, to bail on its Destination series of "convergence" devices, the fact remains that hooking your computer up to your home theater system can be pretty cool. As the brains of a home theater system, a PC is—in many ways—unrivaled. Once it's hooked up to a decent home audio setup, the PC can be used for everything from playing DVDs, games, and MP3s to surfing the Internet—just to name a few. Take a gander at our setup.


Paradigm
12X

Ready to incur the envy of all your friends?

Home Theater Comes of Age

★★★★½



A few months ago we received a call from Paradigm's PR representative, asking us if we'd be interested in reviewing a set of home theater speakers. "Sure," we said, "we'd be more than happy to put 'em through their paces." Imagine our surprise when *six* boxes showed up.

By gaming standards, Paradigm's Blockbuster Home Theater System (retailing at over $800) is about as high end as high end gets. The satellites and center speaker pack 40 watts each and the ample subwoofer was so powerful that even with my office door closed, our managing editor could easily tell I was playing COUNTER-STRIKE as opposed to writing this story.

One significant thing needs to be made clear, though: These are not computer speakers; they're home theater speakers that are designed to connect to a standard AV receiver, not your run-of-the-mill sound card. Wishing to do these speakers justice, we got our hands on a Pioneer VSX-D510 AV receiver and Hercules' Game Theater XP sound card. We connected the speakers to the receiver, and the receiver to the Game Theater's coaxial audio cable. We then placed the sound center above the monitor, with the front satellites on either side of the monitor and the rear satellites on the stands that came with the package.



Firing up our standard batch of DVDs—*The Thin Red Line*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Gladiator*, and *The Matrix*—showed just how awesome these speakers are. They're easily the best-sounding speakers we've heard, and their clarity and range were awesome while watching the movies in 5.1-channel Dolby Surround. But this review wouldn't be complete without addressing the gaming experience. Since COUNTER-STRIKE is the game *du jour* in the *CGW* offices, I can safely say that I've logged 50-plus hours playing it with these speakers, and the experience is unrivaled. Their range is such that pinpointing where a firefight was occurring was a cinch, and more than once I was able to take out an opponent who was attempting to sneak up on me.

If your computer also serves as your home entertainment system, then the Paradigm Blockbuster Home Theater System is a great way to go.

—*William O'Neal*

$800 | Paradigm | www.paradigm.ca

Pros

Spectacular sound.

Cons

Hella expensive.

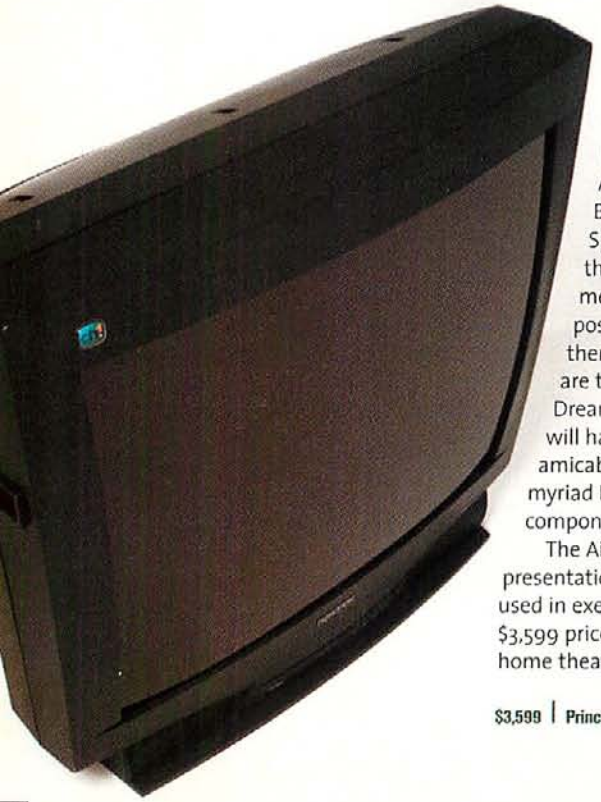
Requirements

AV receiver capable of 5.1-channel sound.

Princeton's HDTV display, while cheaper than most, still costs a pretty penny

Princeton Ai3.6HD

★★★★★



If MacGyver had a home theater, I can guarantee you he'd choose the Princeton Ai3.6HD as his display option. Boasting more hookups than Spring Break, the Ai3.6HD more than once during setup caused me to ask myself, "What could you possibly connect to this plug?" But there's no need to worry; chances are that anything you own—PS2, Dreamcast, DVD player, computer—will have no problem finding an amicable port among the Ai3.6HD's myriad RGB, S-video, composite, component, and VGA connections.

The Ai3.6HD is billed as primarily a presentation display, and it's meant to be used in executive boardrooms and such; its $3,599 price tag attests to that. But in the home theater realm, few displays can match its abundance (in some cases, overabundance) of ports, options, features, and capabilities.

With a 36-inch viewable screen, the Ai3.6HD supports all HDTV and digital TV formats, and can be used to surf the Internet as well as access complete channel listings. We found ourselves not terribly intrigued by the Ai3.6HD's Internet capabilities, as connecting to the Internet

$3,599 | Princeton Graphics | www.princetonhdtv.com

Pros

More connections than Puff Daddy; less expensive than other HDTVs.

Cons

About as expensive as a night out on the town with Puff Daddy.

Requirements

Any video source.



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Princeton Ai3.6HD

continued from page 82



Princeton's Ai3.6HD is no "genuine child of Zion." This baby has more options than Chris Webber.

at 56k is about as sexy as the women in my grandmother's quilting bee (the Ai3.6HD can also connect to the Internet via DSL or a cable modem).

What we wanted to do was hook the thing up to this month's Power Rig to play some games—HALF-LIFE: COUNTER-STRIKE and HIGH HEAT 2002—from the comfort of a couch. HIGH HEAT 2002 looked great at the maximum resolution of 1024x768, and *CGW* editor Tom "Pooperstar" Price had no problem whuping my ass at it. But games like HALF-LIFE and QUAKE III ARENA felt funny played at that distance—which is no fault of the monitor's. And because the Ai3.6HD is essentially a television, fonts in both Windows and games looked fuzzy at the higher resolutions (as they would with any TV hooked up to a computer), so it was often difficult to discern what the menus said.

Our main beef with the Ai3.6HD, though, is its price tag—$3,000-plus is a serious barrier to entry. Users looking to create a computer-based home theater setup can get really good similarly sized TVs—such as Sony's WEGA series—without the Internet appliance feature, HDTV capabilities, or deluge of connection options for under $2,000. But then, of course, you won't have the coolest, most complete setup around.
—William O'Neal

Remember convergence? Logitech sure does

review

No Need to Get Up Off'n That Couch

★★★★½

Since Logitech has the cordless peripherals market locked up, it's no surprise that the company's Cordless Freedom Pro keyboard-and-mouse combo is solid.

The Cordless Freedom Pro is basically a contoured version of the Cordless Freedom Navigator and packs the same bells and whistles: a customizable four-button PS/2 or USB wheelmouse, and an ergonomic PS/2 or USB keyboard that sports Logitech's iTouch controls. With the iTouch system, users can launch everything from Web browsers and email clients to multimedia players like Real Player. The keyboard even has volume, mute, play/pause, stop, forward, and rewind buttons. While I wasn't able to launch Winamp with the iTouch keys, once it was started I could control the application with the keyboard.

But while the keyboard is comfortable, the mouse isn't. I typically use a Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer, and while the two are similar, the location of the Logitech's thumb button got in the way so much that I just unassigned it. At first this seemed like a workable solution, but when I started playing games, I found myself holding my thumb above the button to avoid accidentally pushing it. After about 15 minutes of COUNTER-STRIKE, my hand was killing me.

While the idea of playing games or surfing the Internet from your couch has yet to catch on, if you're one of the few who are into this then the Cordless Freedom Pro could be your ticket. You might want to play around with that mouse before you plunk down the $100, though.
—William O'Neal

Pros

Works from the comfort of your nasty-ass couch.

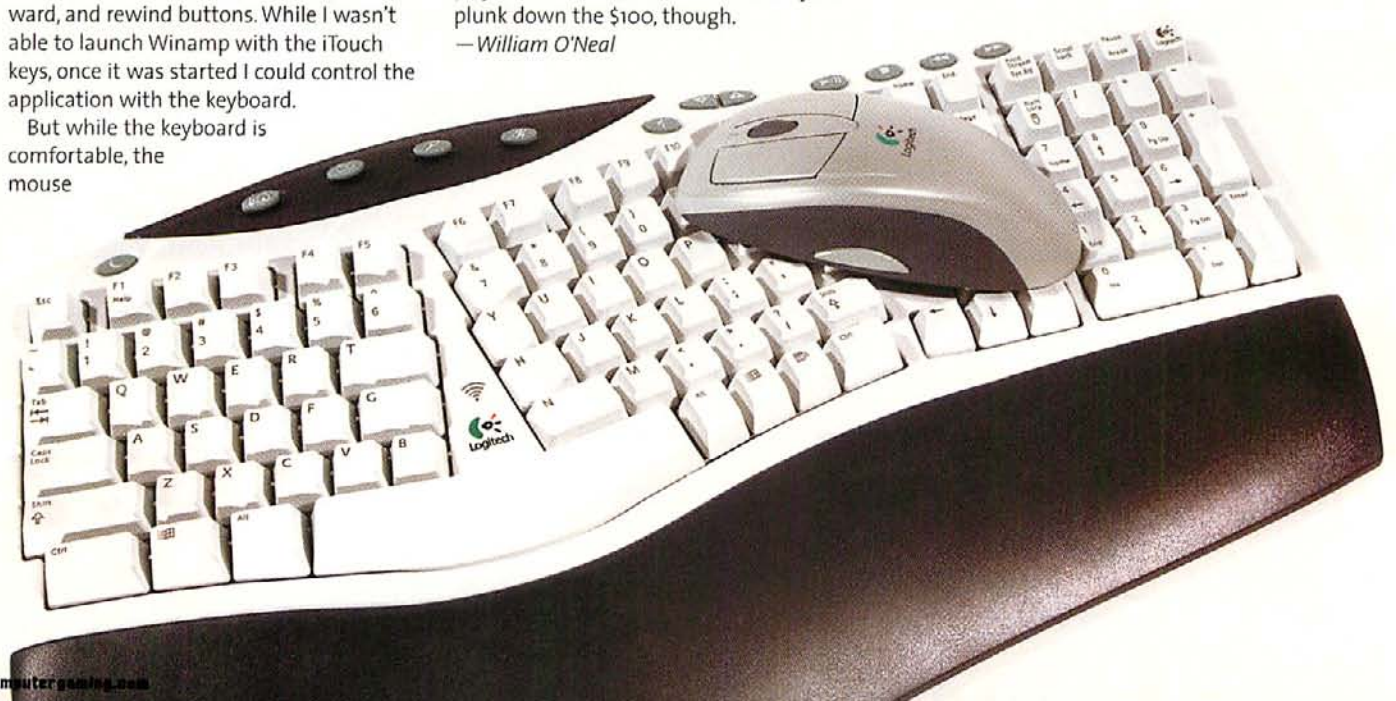
Cons

Mouse isn't very comfortable—thumb button gets in the way.

Requirements

PC; available USB or PS/2 port for keyboard; available USB or PS/2 port for mouse.

$99 | Logitech | www.logitech.com



Wil Power



I Went to E3 and All I Got Were Two Dozen XL T-Shirts

E3 is a bizarre experience, to say the least. On the one hand, software and hardware vendors can't wait to show off their wares. On the other, by day two everyone is so tired from schlepping around the Los Angeles Convention Center that vendors and editors alike spend most of our meetings just going through the motions.

Vendor: "This device is going to change the way gamers play turn-based strategy games."

Me: "You're totally right, I hate using my keyboard and mouse when I'm playing SHADOW COMPANY."

That said, however, this year's show reminded me how happy I am to be a hardware guy—again. While my *CGW* brothers were forced to attend meeting after sleep-inducing meeting, I had to visit only a few companies: nVidia, AMD, Hercules (Thrustmaster), Dolby, VisionTek, Logitech, ATI, Saitek, and Microsoft among them.

So what did I learn this year? Well, a few things: Thrustmaster and Saitek are still waging their jihad against your keyboard and mouse. An armistice has been signed that essentially ended the graphics technology wars—and you know who won. A new war seems to be brewing on the audio technology front. And Creative Labs wasn't even present at E3 (I guess its SoundBlaster Live sound cards are so popular that it doesn't even need to promote them). Think it's good to be the king? Just ask 3dfx. AMD is still committed to gamers, while it appears that Intel doesn't give a rat's ass about us. And I learned two things about Microsoft: It's coming out with a console system this fall that was kind of popular at the show, and Ed Fries, Microsoft's top game guy, knows how to party like it's 1999!

Thanks for visiting, don't forget to tip your waitresses, try the veal, and remember, I'll be here all week.

—William O'Neal

TECH MEDICS

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

Hey Mom, Can I Borrow Your Visa?

My PC is jokingly obsolete, barely able to send this email. I'd love to get a new system that could keep pace with my friend's 1.5GHz CPU, 84MB RAM, nVidia GeForce2 graphics card, etc. I'm looking for a system that's fully UNREAL TOURNAMENT and DIABLO II (multiplayer) capable, but not too expensive, preferably under $1,500. My mom couldn't pull it off for Christmas, or my birthday in February, so I'm hoping you can give me some hope!

For about $1,500 you can get a Dell computer with a 1.3GHz Pentium IV CPU, 128MB RAM, a 20GB hard drive, a 17-inch monitor, a 32MB GeForce2 MX graphics card, and a Sound Blaster Live sound card. Quick—go get mom's credit card before she changes her mind.

$600 on Fusaichi Pegasus

My system is a fossil: 233MHz Pentium processor, 32MB of EDO RAM, and an ATI 3D Rage II video card. What kind of upgrades do you recommend with a budget of around $500 to $600?

Oh man, that's a tough one. What you need is a new computer. And I'm sorry to say that $600 ain't gonna do it. What I suggest you do is take your $600 to the nearest racetrack and bet it on the ponies. If you're lucky, you may double or even triple your money, giving you the $1,200 to $1,800 you need to buy a seriously kick-ass rig.

Thanks for Calling the Psychic Friends

Having just read the May issue of *CGW*, and specifically your column, I figured I'd drop you a question because you do seem to be very knowledgeable. My question is this: Why does my life suck? I mean, people either take me too seriously or they think I'm a joke. I don't understand why. Can you help?

You guys are really throwing the tough questions at me this month. Anyway, I'd have to guess that your life sucks because you put so much weight on what other people think of you. While it is a bit of a catch-22, the less you worry about what others think of you, the higher those opinions are likely to be. And if they don't think highly of you, since you won't really give a damn, it won't really matter.

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Killer Rigs

The best recipe for building your ultimate gaming machine

If all the email I receive from our readers is any sign, then you're all gonna welcome our new Killer Rigs section. Seeing that computers are more than simply the sum of their parts, I felt that our old Killer Rigs format covered only half the equation: which top-notch components are best to include in a machine that you're building. What was left out was how well this "dream machine" would actually perform in some real-world tests.

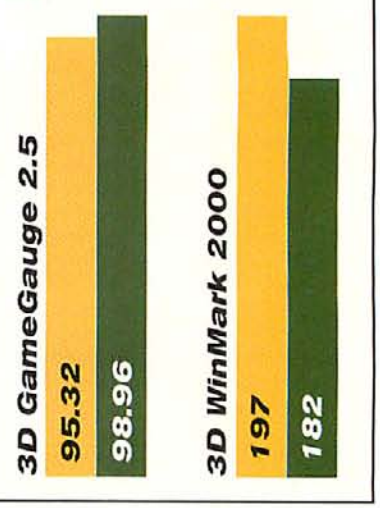
As you all know, building a machine from scratch, while a lot easier than it used to be, is a pain in the ass. Beyond the hassle of pulling together all the components you'd like to include, there are innumerable unforeseen driver—as well as hardware—compatibility issues. That said, there is a strange sense of satisfaction that comes from putting your own little baby together, hitting the power button, and having everything work the way you want it to.

While each month won't necessarily include a full-on, two-page *Killer Rigs* spread, each month we will publish benchmark results detailing how our two machines stack up against their "boxed" competitors. We hope that you enjoy the new section.

Finally, send an email to **william_o'neal @ziffdavis.com** if you want to hear about the crazy hack I had to employ to get my machine up and running.

—William O'Neal

The Benchmarks



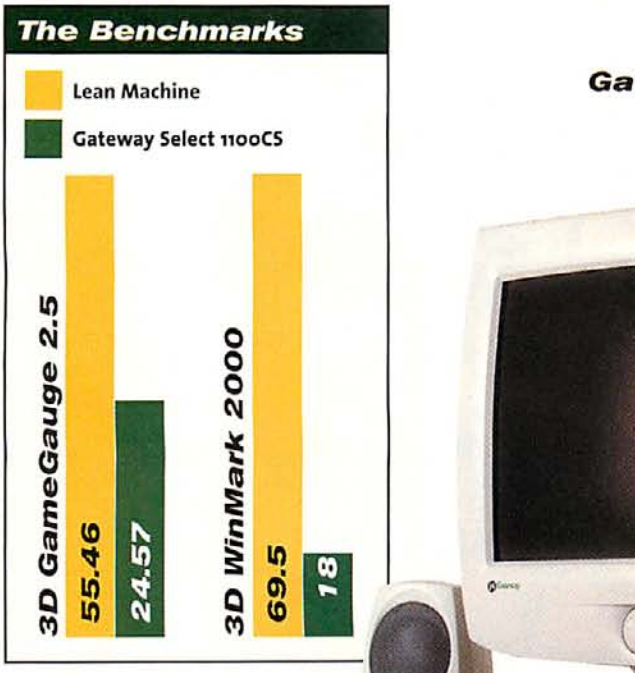
Power Rig as tested: $2,780
Falcon Mach V as tested: $3,500

Power Rig



The ASUS A7A266 motherboard we used in building this month's Power Rig is extremely versatile in that it boasts three SDRAM slots and two DDR RAM slots. You'll notice that we went with SDRAM instead DDR RAM—the SDRAM is a little cheaper. While my predecessor Dave Salvator is a big fan of SCSI systems, I believe that a 7,200-RPM EIDE drive is—for lack of a better phrase—fast enough. Finally, we chose the Hercules Game Theater XP sound card because it has a load of input options and adds four USB ports, eliminating the need for a USB hub.

Component	Manufacturer	Price
Case	Antec SX-830	$90
Motherboard	ASUS A7A266	$150
CPU	1.4GHz AMD Athlon	$300
Memory	Crucial 256MB PC133 SDRAM	$100
Graphics Card	VisionTek GeForce3	$400
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$25
Hard Drive	Maxtor DiamondMax 80GB Ultra ATA (7,200 RPM)	$250
CD-R	Plextor PlexWriter 16/10/40A	$200
CD-ROM/DVD	Creative PC-DVD Encore 12x	$140
Monitor	KDS AV-21e 21"	$480
Sound Card	Hercules Game Theater XP	$150
Speakers	Altec Lansing ADA890 Dolby Digital THX-Certified Speaker System	$300
Modem	Actiontec 56K PCI Pro Modem	$50
Keyboard/Mouse	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro with IntelliMouse Optical	$75
Joystick	Saitek Cyborg USB Gold Stick	$40
Game Pad	Thrustmaster FireStorm Dual Power	$30
Total:		**$2,780**



Lean Machine as tested: $1,185
Gateway Select 1100CS as tested: $1,100



Lean Machine

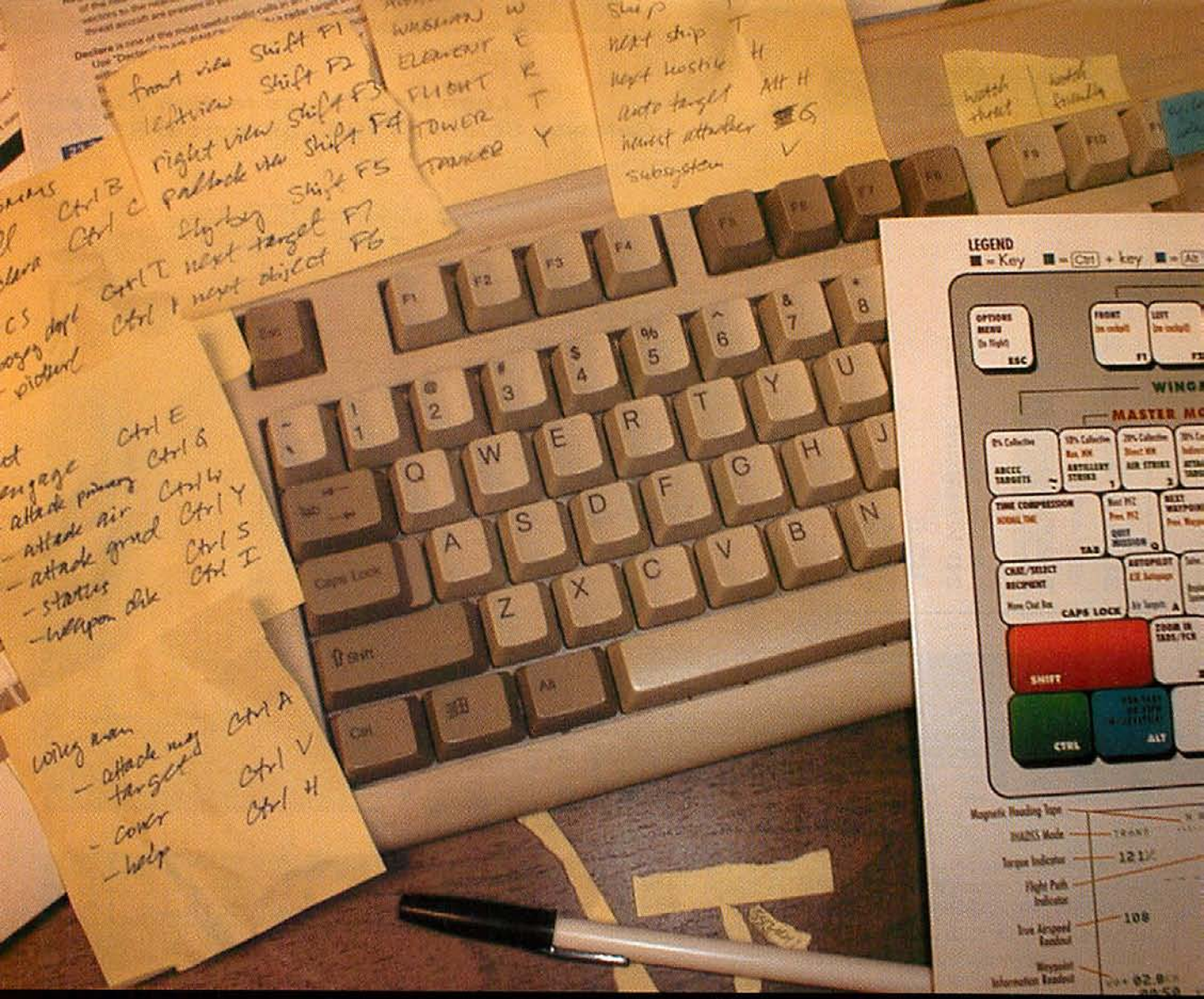
This month's Lean Machine is a little beefier than the made-to-order one from Gateway that we tested, thanks in large part to the Hercules Prophet 4500 graphics card we put in it. The thing is, it costs nearly $100 more than the Gateway machine and you have to build it yourself. Replace the RIVA128 graphics card that ships with the Gateway with the Hercules Prophet 4500 or any GeForce2MX-based graphics card, and the results with that machine will be decidedly different.

Component	Manufacturer	Price
Case	Antec SX-830	$80
Motherboard	ASUS A7V-E	$90
CPU	900GHz AMD Duron	$90
Memory	Crucial 128MB PC133 SDRAM	$50
Graphics Card	Hercules Prophet 4500	$150
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$25
Hard Drive	Maxtor DiamondMax VL40 40GB ATA (5,400 RPM)	$100
CD-ROM/DVD	Creative PC-DVD Encore 12x	$140
Monitor	KDS Avitron AV-7TF 17"	$200
Sound Card	Creative SoundBlaster Live Value	$40
Speakers	Altec Lansing ACS95W	$25
Modem	Actiontec 56K PCI Pro Modem	$50
Keyboard/Mouse	Microsoft Internet Keyboard Pro with IntelliMouse Optical	$75
Joystick	Saitek Cyborg USB Gold Stick	$40
Game Pad	Thrustmaster FireStorm Dual Power	$30
Total:		**$1,185**

Extreme Tech

If you're thinking about making an upgrade—or you just bought a pile of hardware and you're wondering, "Now what?"—head on over to the ExtremeTech website. Former *CGW* hardware gurus Dave Salvator and Loyd Case have designed the site for technology enthusiasts. ExtremeTech offers the latest information on motherboards, CPUs, 3D cards, audio, networking, digital imaging, gadgets, security, and more. Check it out at www.extremetech.com.





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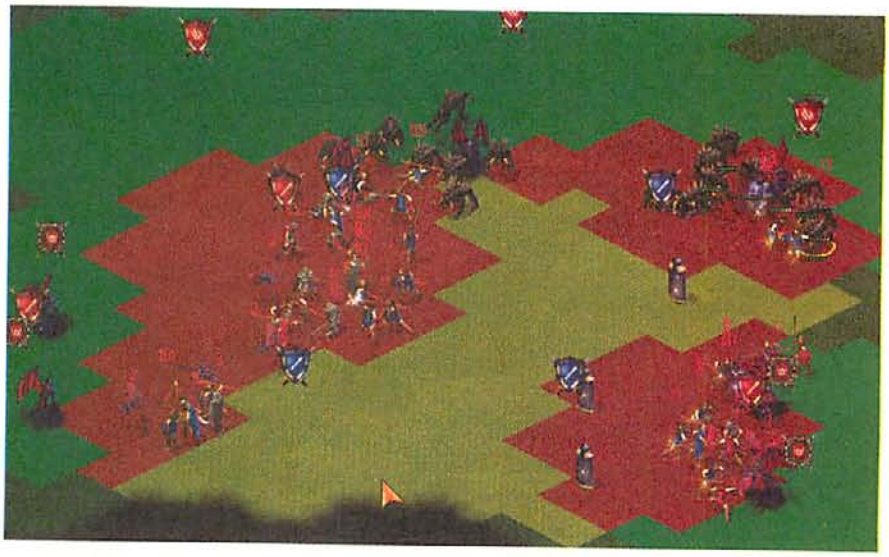
Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns

Be the most immortal sovereign of all

by Elliott Chin

A quirky real-time strategy game from a new developer, and it has the goofy subtitle "IMMORTAL SOVEREIGN" right after the already goofy "KOHAN" name? Despite such stacked odds, KOHAN turns out to be a surprisingly good game. Although it arrived with little fanfare, it has quickly become a favorite among strategy gamers. Its blend of real-time gameplay, simplified city management, and abstract tactical combat makes it both easy to learn and incredibly fun to play. But don't confuse its simplicity and intuitive mechanics for shallow gameplay. KOHAN has lots of depth, and those who can master its nuances and secrets will have an advantage when facing tough scenarios or tougher human opponents.

What follows is a general strategy guide for playing KOHAN. There's an overview of the four factions and their strengths, a unit overview, a primer on



Ceyah void beasts make for great cavalry units, but you have to be careful with them because of their Khaldunite vulnerability.

The Four KOHAN-ateers

KOHAN's four factions—the Ceyah, the Council, the Nationalists, and the Royalists—each have their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as unique units. In multiplayer games, each faction also has a special elite unit that no other faction can build, even if one faction eventually conquers another's towns. Each faction breakdown provides a general overview of the faction including its bonuses, unique buildings, elite unit, and a list of the units it can build.

Ceyah

The Ceyah are the most unusual of the four factions, sharing little with the other three. They field mostly Shadow troops and undead. In fact, all their infantry, cavalry, and archery units are either undead or demons. Keep in mind that this makes the Ceyah vulnerable to many different kinds of attacks, such as Khaldunite weaponry, magic, holy attacks, and anti-Shadow attacks. Some units, such as paladins and battle priests, are the bane of Ceyah units. So when playing Ceyah, be wary of the Council and Royalist factions, which have many anti-Shadow units. However, the Ceyah have excellent support units that more than make up for the vulnerabilities of the frontline units. Some of these support units have bonuses against all non-Shadow creatures—meaning all the other factions. Ceyah mages and priests have an excellent complement of attack spells and spells that can weaken or rout enemy troops. Ceyah players are very good at exploration, as they can immediately build shadelings, which are fast fliers. Additionally, the Ceyah can field an extra company, so in the early game they have an advantage in being able to support an additional company for exploration or offense. Ceyah units are fairly cheap, and several of them carry little or no upkeep cost.

Bonuses: As a Ceyah, your buildings are stronger, with +20 percent hit points. Also, the Ceyah get a one-company bonus. The Council and Nationalists can support only one company with a town, but a Ceyah player can support two companies. With two towns, which normally support two companies, a Ceyah player can support three companies.

Unique buildings: Turreted Ramparts, Nightbringer (built from the Temple), and Mana Forge.

Elite unit: The Ceyah elite unit is the void beast, which is a powerful cavalry beast.

Frontline units: skeleton, zombie, shadelings, shadow beasts, bone bow.

Support units: dreadlord, prophet, necromancer, shadow demon, shadow priest, magician, wraith.

Council

The Council is a good faction to play if you want a fast-building and strong faction. Its bonuses allow a Council player to build towns quickly and amass more gold faster than any other faction. These advantages are good for newbies, as a lack of gold is one of the main impediments to empire building. Council players have a good array of anti-Shadow units, such as the paladin and the channeler, so Council companies are well equipped with healing and protection magic. They also have good raw firepower in their support units, such as the wizard, although they don't have quite as much sheer damage potential as the Ceyah or Royalists. In general, the Council faction is strong because it accrues more gold and can upgrade its settlements for less.

Bonuses: Council players get a 25 percent discount on upgrading their settlements to the next level. In addition, upgrading to the next settlement level takes 20 percent less time. The Council's biggest bonus is its gain of +20 percent gold from its settlements.

city management, and general tips on empire building, terrain, and tactics.

Start It Up

Explore the map early and snatch up any mines, such as iron deposits, Khaldunite deposits, and stone quarries. Resources are vitally important, especially stone. You'll need to place an outpost near the mines in order to get the benefits, as mines outside your zone of control will not operate.

Build a company of settlers right away. You'll need gold in a hurry, and the fastest way to get it is to found a new settlement. As soon as the settlers create a town, you'll want to create a company of engineers. Have your engineers build an outpost by your newly founded town to help defend it. In the early game, your new town will be weak, and the nearby outpost will help it survive longer.

Also, use your engineers to build outposts near your mines and border towns. Don't be afraid to build more than one outpost near key areas, like choke points on the map and mines, or in front of enemy cities to keep them pinned in. Note, though, that you can have a maximum of 20 outposts at a time. As you expand your borders, raze the outposts near your inner empire so that you can build outposts near your new towns.

If you're building new towns on hostile borders frequented by enemy troops, build a wall right away to add militiamen and improve their combat abilities. It will also save your buildings if your town does get conquered. And keep in mind that armory guilds and upgraded walls add militia strength. However, walls cost more stone than an outpost does, so if you are going for an outpost strategy to defend your borders and seal off enemy pathways, remember that you won't be able to fortify your settlements as well.

If you aren't going for a purely defensive strategy, you'll need lots of gold, more than you'll need stone. Gold is always at a premium—you can't have enough of it. In the early game, if you find yourself not needing iron, build a blacksmith and upgrade it to an iron export. Odds are that early on you won't be fielding more than two or three companies, and if they don't require iron, you might as well sell it. You'll get more bang for your buck with iron than with a wood or stone export.

Additionally, in those towns where you can afford the slot, build a market as soon as possible. If you find you need the resources, you can always convert the market to a bank, and get +15 gold without having to sell any resources. In general, keep close watch over your



Even though these are elite bowmen, they're terrible when it comes to attacking buildings or being frontline units.



Whenever you can, especially if you plan on being defensive, try to accrue as much money with whatever buildings and resources you have.

Unique buildings: Wizard Tower (built from the Library; provides magical protection from sieges), Light of Faith (built from the Temple; enables the Channeler).
Elite unit: elite bowman.
Frontline units: footman, infantry, grenadier, scout, dragoon, bowman.
Support units: cleric, paladin, channeler, wizard.

Nationalists

The Nationalist faction isn't a faction for newbies, as it has a few penalties. Nationalists have larger settlements and so can build one more component per settlement than any other faction. However, the extra building slot means that in order to upgrade from a town to a village, you need to build two buildings instead of one. Nationalists also have to pay more than the other factions to upgrade through all settlement levels—settlement upgrades cost an extra one-third (so 150 becomes 200, 300 becomes 400, and so on). On average, a Nationalist player will have a harder time upgrading and climbing to better troop types, especially against a Council player. Consequently, Nationalists have more powerful melee units than any other faction. However, with the exception of the magician unit, they don't have quite the magical firepower of other factions. And they don't have the same level of anti-Shadow power as the Royalists or Council factions. A skilled player can take advantage of the Nationalists units, but new players will find it a more difficult faction to play.
Bonuses: Nationalists can build one additional component in their settlements, but only at the town, village, and city levels (not at citadel level). However, very early in the game, that means Nationalists have to build an extra building before they can upgrade their towns to villages. All Nationalist settlements have a +20 percent zone of support, meaning friendly troops can stay slightly farther away and still get healed. This is a modest bonus on the defensive, and lets Nationalist players station defensive troops farther away from their cities.
Unique buildings: Factory, Nightbringer (built from the Temple; enables the Zealot).
Elite unit: The elite guard, an immensely powerful infantry unit.
Frontline units: footman, infantry, grenadier, scout, dragoon, bowman.
Support units: cleric, paladin, ranger, summoner, magician, zealot.

Royalists

Royalists are a well-rounded faction, with strong melee units and good support units. They have neither the obvious bonuses of the Council nor the penalties of the Nationalists. Royalists are very good against Ceyah and Shadow units, since they have many holy support units and even their elite unit wields Khaldunite weaponry. Their ability to group and support an additional company helps in the early game, allowing Royalists to augment their manpower for tactical combat and general exploration.
Unique bonuses: Like the Ceyah, the Royalists can support an extra company. So if a Council or Nationalists player with one village and one town could support three companies, a Royalists player with one village and one town could support four. Royalists also have larger militia companies.
Unique buildings: Billet, Eternal Path (built from the Temple; enables the Battlepriest).
Elite unit: The cavalier, the most powerful cavalry unit. It does the most damage per attack and wields Khaldunite, making it especially effective against Ceyah units.
Frontline units: footman, infantry, grenadier, scout, dragoon, bowman.
Support units: battlepriest, cleric, paladin, ranger, sorceress, magician.



Use your engineers early on to create outposts and possibly tear down opponent outposts.

resources. If you have surplus stone, wood, or iron, then obviously you can afford to either build more companies or sell the excess for gold. If you have +30 stone, wood, and iron, then you aren't managing your resources wisely. It's best to designate only a few key cities as your main production facilities. KOHAN luckily does not assign upkeep costs per town; instead, it draws upkeep from your pool of resources. So just create two or three production centers and use the other towns for resources.

Once you settle on a main war front for a while, consider building a new town on the front and making it your main production center. Build a barracks, library, and temple there and create your armies from the town. This keeps your war effort well supplied and cuts down on the time you'd expend in walking your troops from main production sites in the heart of your empire to the front lines.

Engage and Destroy

Be careful when using the "pressed" mode to hurry troops into combat. Their battle efficiency takes a nosedive while they are rushing, and they won't automatically engage enemy units. Their line of sight also shrinks, which means they don't acquire their targets early enough and are more susceptible to getting hit by ambushes. When you are nearing your destination, switch from pressed to "skirmish" formation so that your troops get an immediate boost in vision and can auto-acquire enemies. Their efficiency also will slowly return to peak. Even during fighting, efficiency takes its sweet time, so switch formations long enough before combat to let efficiency increase to peak by the time you engage the enemy.

Make use of custom formations to create more delta-shaped and clustered armies. If you just bandbox units and set them to attack, march, and so on, they'll assume a straight line, which spreads them out too thin. It also means that if they encounter enemies, the companies on the edges will miss the battles entirely and be too far away to aid their comrades automatically. Create custom



These cavalry units are attacking from the forest, giving them defensive bonuses but hindering their inherently fast movement.



Towns near resources lacking adequate protection can be in danger even from undead archer units.



Royalists get cavaliers, which amount to an anti-shadow/Ceyah death squad.

Shaky Ground

In KOHAN, terrain has an affect on combat and movement. The key to winning many battles is using the terrain to your advantage. Here are the different types of terrain and their effects, along with the effects of entrenched and fortified states, which offer the same sort of defense bonus-versus-movement trade-offs as terrain.

Beach On the beach, units get +5 bonus to defense, but movement is reduced by 13 percent.

Rough Rough ground gives no bonus, but reduces movement by 13 percent.

Grass On grass, units have no bonuses to defense and no penalties to movement.

Desert In deserts, units have no bonuses to defense, but get a 50 percent penalty to movement.

Hills In hills, units get a +2 bonus to defense, but movement is reduced by 22 percent.

Forest Forests give a +4 defense bonus, but reduce movement by 36 percent.

Entrenched If you leave a company idle for a while, it will become entrenched. In this state, your units get a +3 defense bonus, but cannot move. If they move, they instantly lose the bonus.

Fortified If you leave an entrenched company sitting idle even longer, it becomes fortified. In this state, the company gets a +6 defense bonus, but cannot move. Again, the bonus disappears as soon as the company moves.



Try using multiple companies, especially "dummy" ones, to keep your opponent confused and to preserve your expensive heroes.

Experience This!

As companies explore the map and engage in combat, they become more experienced. Companies accrue a tiny amount of experience very slowly over time, but most xp (experience points) must come from engaging in battles. As they gain more experience, companies advance to new levels, increasing their relative power. The four levels of experience are:

Recruit Units begin at this level and are as they appear; their stats are not yet enhanced.

Regular After earning 50 xp, the company becomes regulars. Attack and defense values for all elements in the company improve to 110 percent.

Veteran After earning 150 xp, the company becomes veterans. Its attack and defense values improve to 125 percent.

Elite After earning 300 xp, the company becomes elite. Its attack and defense values improve to 150 percent.

formations that are two or three rows deep, so that your army is compact and able to respond to attacks en masse.

Because you can't disengage once you enter combat unless you retreat or get routed, you should monitor your troops carefully. If you lose more than three of your main troops, click on the retreat button. If you wait until only one or two units remain in your company, they'll probably be cut down while running. But if you run when you're down to half or one-third strength, you'll have a better chance of escaping with at least one unit, which is all you need to resupply to full strength. Be especially cautious with companies that have heroes. You don't want to lose your heroes, especially if they are high level, so make sure you retreat as soon as you see your hero's hp (hit points) getting whacked.

When your leader is killed, you can only be routed; no retreat is possible. In this case, you don't control where your army runs. And until your leader is reborn, your units will stand immobile and you won't be able to command the company. So always take special care to keep your leader alive, and retreat it if you must to preserve the leader's life.

Company, Assemble!

Unit management is extremely important in KOHAN—don't let the simplistic combat fool you. Your support units are generally physically weak, so travel in skirmish mode as often as possible to protect your spellcasters; combat mode exposes your flank. Also, create fodder companies to send in first against enemy companies. Because of the way companies auto-acquire targets, the enemy company will attack these "decoys" and you can then march in from the flank.

When creating companies and assigning support units, take note of the support unit's modifiers, both provided and bonus. In general, provided modifiers are bonuses that apply to the whole company and stack. Thus, two paladins each provide a +5 shadowbane bonus to all company units for a total of +10 shadowbane (an attack bonus against shadow creatures). Should one paladin die the bonus drops to +5. Modifiers listed as bonuses are usually specific to the unit. So the paladin's holy attack (+6 against shadow creatures) applies only to him. It pays to read the unit descriptions carefully. Some additional information that you won't find in the manual follows.

Infantry

Skeletons: These units are virtually immune to ranged attacks and are great against archers.

Zombies: Although they have no upkeep cost, zombies are generally too slow and weak.

Footmen: This unit gets a +3 bonus against cavalry, but is otherwise unexceptional.

Cavalry

Shadelings: These units are good only for scouting; they can barely fight settlers. One benefit is that they have no upkeep cost.

Shadow Beast: These units are great troops, and cost only 1 upkeep. They should be a staple of your army.

Scouts: Not good for combat, just

SimCity, KOHAN-style

Managing your cities is a fairly easy affair in KOHAN, but it is vitally important to the ultimate success of your empire. Here is some general information that will help you manage your cities better:

The four settlement types are: village, town, city, and citadel. Each level of your settlement gives you an additional 5 gold. The first settlement, the village, gives 5 gold per minute; the second settlement, the town, gives 10 gold; and so on.

When you first settle a village, it has one slot and produces 5 gold. To upgrade it to a town, you'll need to build one building component and then pay 150 gold. You should almost always build a quarry first, since your early companies will be either engineers or settlers, both of which cost stone for upkeep. Once you upgrade to a town, you'll get two more slots for a total of three, and at that point you can tailor your building strategy to the units you want to field. If you want raw firepower, go for a library. On the other hand, if your settlement in is in dangerous territory, you might want to build walls.

To upgrade from a town to a city, you need to fill all your three slots and pay 300 gold. To upgrade to a citadel, you need to fill your slots and have one upgraded building, as well as pay 750 gold.

One thing to note when upgrading your resource buildings, such as quarries and woodmills, is that you can only have one of each type per settlement. For example, if you build a blacksmith, it gives you +6 iron. However, if you upgrade it to an armory guild for a better militia and cheaper infantry, you cannot then build another blacksmith and upgrade it to a blast furnace, which would give you an additional +4 iron. So while you would still get the +6 iron from the blacksmith if you upgrade to an armory guild (upgrade benefits are layered on top of the existing building's benefits), you wouldn't be able to build more blacksmiths if you needed more iron. If you wanted to build a blast furnace, you would have to raze the armory guild, then build a new blacksmith to upgrade.



Immediately create a settler and an engineer and make a name for yourself in the new world.

for recon.
Dragoon: Their only benefit is speed. Otherwise, grenadiers are just as good. Never match a dragoon unit with a slow support unit, because that cancels out the only advantage it really has against heavy infantry. This usually means pairing dragoons with rangers.

Archery units

Bonebow: These are great anti-archer troops because they suffer virtually no damage from enemy arrows.
Bowman: Archer units in general are terrible for attacking towns and outposts, and should be used only as support, not as frontline units. Create archer-only companies only if you are going to pair them with an infantry company.

Specialty

Engineer: This is your best melee unit until you can build the grenadier and dragoon. Although they are expensive to upkeep, they are surprisingly strong. If you have an abundance of stone, build these.

Warmages

Magician: These mages do the most damage per spell attack. They also confer a +4 morale bonus to their company. Attaching two to a grenadier company means absolute destruction, and a +8 morale bonus.
Wizard: In terms of raw power, the wizard is not as good as the magician, although it still does ample damage. It also gives its company a +6 defensive bonus against archers.
Sorceress: The sorceress does little damage with her ice storm spell, but it can freeze any enemy it hits. Sorceresses have the same morale bonus as magicians. In general, they aren't as good as the other spellcasters.
Summoner: The summoner is very weak. She can summon a large elemental that is strong but slow; other than that, she can only use a shield spell. You're better off using a different caster.
Necromancer: Necromancers are weak in combat, with no attack spells. But they can summon two skeletons and cast lethargy, which penalizes enemy units with a -4 attack and reduces movement by 50 percent. Because lethargy doesn't stack, two necromancers in a company is a waste. Attach only one.
Wraith: The wraith is a powerful spellcaster, nearly as strong as the magician. A wraith also increases its company's zone of control to 110 percent, which means the wraith's company can see and attack enemy companies first.

Priests

Cleric: The cleric is a good support unit. It can heal one unit for 60 hp, and also cast a blessing spell that gives a +3 defense value bonus and a +2 attack bonus. While the blessing spell doesn't stack, it's good to have two clerics in a company for the extra healing. The cleric also provides a holy bonus (+2 attack versus shadow creatures) to the whole company.
Channeler: Unlike the cleric, the channeler heals only 25 hp per healing spell, but the spell affects all units in the company. A channeler and a cleric are a good combo, making your company more resilient and longer lasting.
Battlepriest: These priests have a holy bonus (+4 against shadow creatures) that stacks, so two battlepriests confer a +8 against shadow creatures for the whole company. They also add a +4 morale bonus. And each battlepriest can cast shadow burst, which causes good damage to shadow creatures. Two battlepriests are excellent company when fighting the Ceyah, but useless against any other faction.
Zealot: This priest has no direct attack spells, but decreases morale and has spells that cause enemies to suffer 130 percent more damage from attacks. Two zealots in a company are a waste, since their spells don't stack. You'd be better off with clerics anyway.

Other

Paladin: Paladins are great against shadow units, with a holy bonus of +6 for themselves and a shadowbane attack bonus of +5 for the entire company. Two paladins turn any group into a Ceyah-killing company.
Ranger: Rangers are good only for negating movement penalties for cavalry. Having two rangers is a waste; one is best. If you want firepower, go with a warmage instead.
Dreadlord: An anti-paladin. Good against all non-Ceyah because of a +10 attack against non-Shadows. A dreadlord also confers a +4 attack bonus for the company, and an additional +4 to attack routed units. Two dreadlords complement any infantry company well.
Shadow Demon: These creatures can summon two shadelings, but are also powerful melee units on their own. They aren't really spellcasters; they're more like flying units that can call backup. They're very strong, but highly vulnerable to Khaldunite and holy attacks. CGW

Myst III: Exile

Survival tips for your life in exile

by Charles Ardai

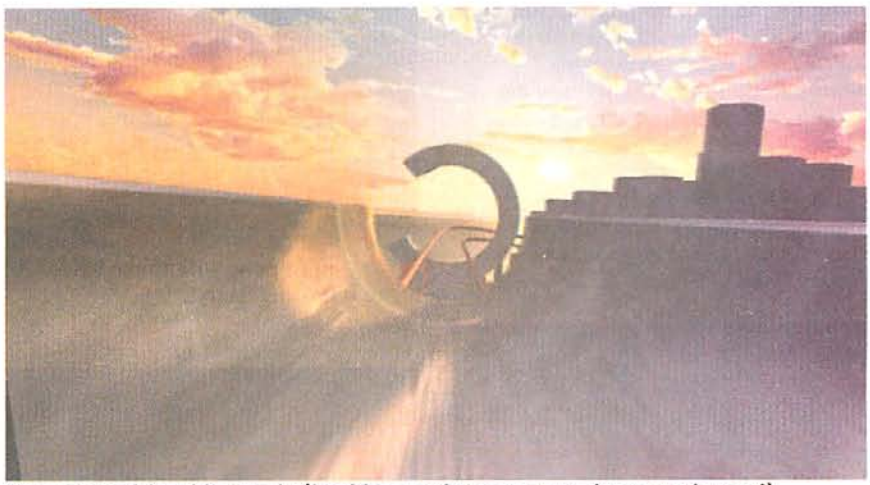
Last month I told you what I thought of MYST III: EXILE. If you went ahead and bought it anyway, you have no one to blame but yourself.

But what's done is done. As you now know, there are a few things that make MYST III: EXILE worth playing. Unfortunately, its gameplay isn't one of them. Gorgeous visuals, sure. One or two nice animated sequences, okay. But to find your way from one of these bits of eye candy to the next you have to solve some of the most monotonous, mechanical puzzles ever to appear on a computer screen. Only a masochist of the first order would want to slog through these puzzles unassisted.

Accordingly, here's an island-by-island tour of some of the game's most painful puzzles. If you are a first-order masochist and don't want your fun spoiled, this might be a good time to turn the page.



Hang some counterweights here, and you'll be off this hapless island.



Your reward for this puzzle (besides getting one step closer to the end).

J'Nanin

The worst of the three puzzles on this hub world involves bouncing a ray of sunlight from one "reflector pole" to another until it finally hits a locked door; when that happens, you can unlock the door. Each pole has a jewel on top, and that's the key to the solution: First rotate each pole so that the light points to the next one in the sequence, then press the buttons on the door in the same sequence. The sequence is yellow, blue, green, red, yellow, purple, red. To get the light to the first (yellow) pole, find the offshore reflector by the beach and turn it till it reflects the sun.

Amateria

Here, your job is to steer giant ice balls safely through a Rube Goldberg–style obstacle course. To get your balls across the balancing metal half-pipe, you'll have to move the fulcrum as far as it can go to the left, and then hang the right set of counterweights in the shack off to one side of the screen. If you paid close attention to some of the props back on J'Nanin and did a little math (which is what we all do when playing computer games, right?), you'd know that the balance you need can be achieved by adding one metal wedge and two wooden wedges to the scale. Or you could just take my word for it.

Edanna

Get ready to do a lot of backtracking in this dense jungle world: When you reach the forking path near a cartoonish cave painting, you're in for about an hour of going back and forth down the left-hand fork, then the right, then the left again, and so on. There's no way around it—you just have to slog through this dismal sequence. One helpful hint: The oversize orchids here play the same role the reflectors play on J'Nanin. Turn the one in the sun until it shines on another that's in shadow, then turn that one till it shines on a light-sensitive fern across the way, opening a new path.

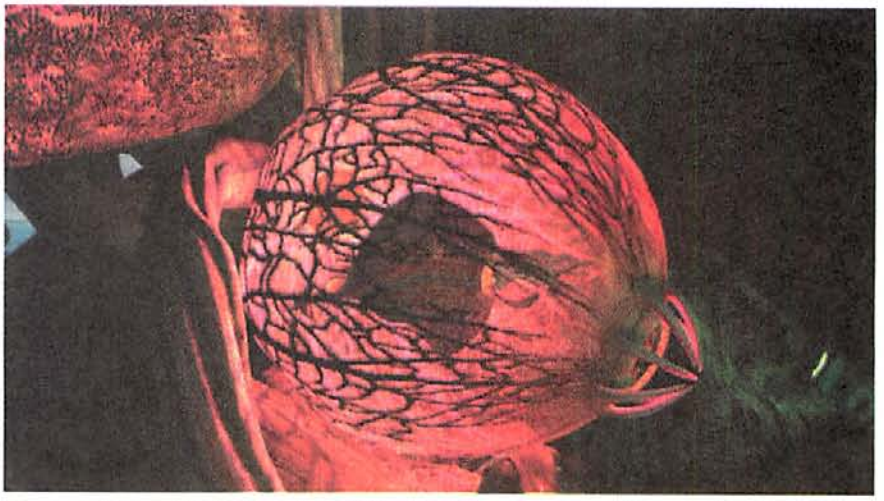
Voltaic

In the airship hangar, you can't inflate the dirigible without resetting three banks of steam valves. Making matters

more complicated, you can't reach the higher valves without using an elevator, and that's steam-powered, too. Once again, you can figure out the solution with some scratch paper and a number two pencil—or you can just try this: Close all the valves on the bottom level; pull the elevator control to rise to the middle level; close three valves; pull the control to go to the top level; close one valve; go down to the middle level and reopen one valve; then go down to the bottom and reopen three valves. Finally, open the valve around the corner to start the flow of steam into the balloon.

Narayan

To open the ice shields on the final world, you have to reconstruct selected geometric figures from the tapestries hanging on the walls, on the waist-high power-control pedestals. Which figures? On the left pedestal, you need to enter the symbols you found on Amateria, Edanna, and Voltaic, plus those associated with the related words from the design rules in Atrus' journal: "Dynamic Forces Spur Change," "Nature Encourages Mutual Dependence," and "Energy Powers Future Motion," respectively. On the right-hand pedestal, you need to enter the words from Atrus' fourth rule: "Balanced Systems Stimulate Civilization." Just copy the tapestry symbols for each word of each phrase by clicking on the corresponding segments in the pedestal displays, starting at the top of each display and working your way around clockwise. The ice will melt, and at long last you'll be finished with this game. CGW



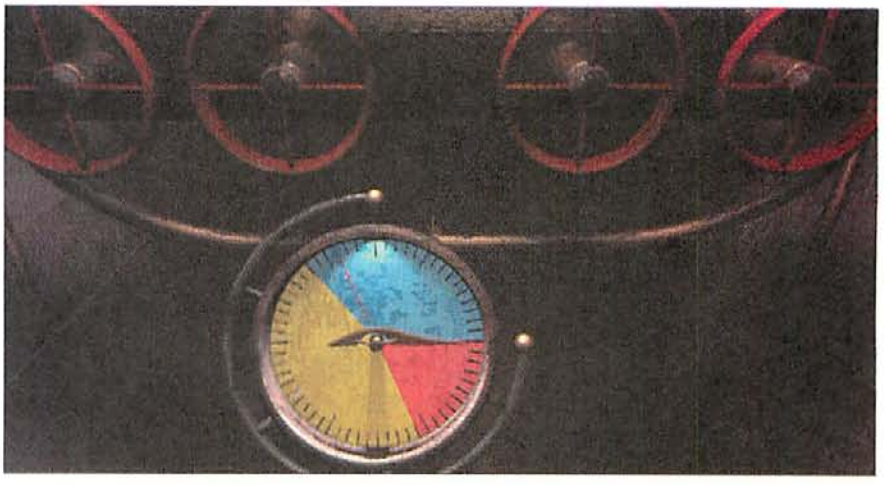
Slap a light on this fish, and you'll be working your way through this dense, dismal jungle.



When you're done with those valves, this blimp signifies that you're in the home stretch for this island.



All that stands between you and the end is Brad Dourif. I sincerely hope you don't lose.



Trust me, just read the solution here, unless you'd like to slog through the sequence with scratch paper and a pencil.

Tropico

Castro demands that you follow these edicts

by Tom Chick



The grid gives a clear view of terrain elevations and slopes.

Do you want a regime that will outlast 10 U.S. presidents, or do you want to be just another blip in a public-school textbook? Consider this a TROPICO-centric edition of The Prince, and you'll be lighting cigars in comfort.

The Lay of the Island

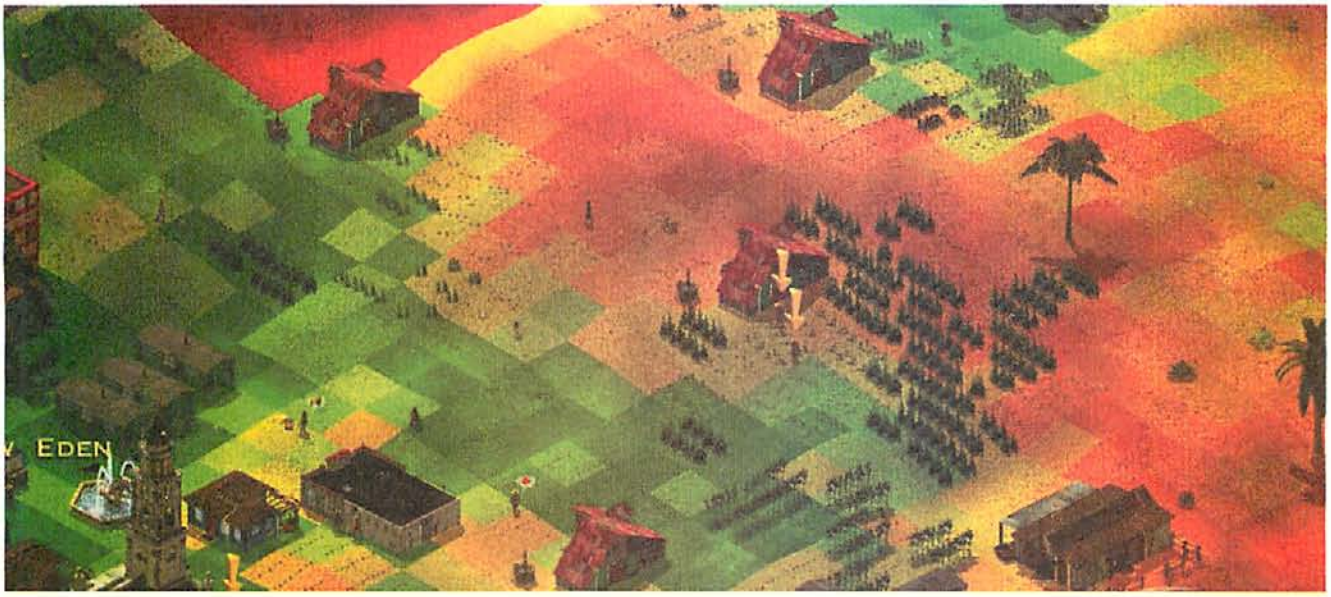
Flat land is your friend. Don't squander it on agriculture, which often fares well enough on a slope. If your island is particularly hilly, consider razing some of your initial farms and rebuilding them on slopes when the scenario opens. Use the grid display (hot-key "G") to get a better idea of how steep certain areas are. The undocumented Shift-P command brings up a polygonal wireframe display, which also helps. As you're building your island during the early years, be sure to leave room for the necessary big civic buildings (at the very least a church, a clinic, and if you're playing a scenario that lasts longer than 30 years, a high school).

When you're placing farms and mines, don't drop them on the richest real estate. Think of these structures as the gathering points for your workers, who come out and work the best land in the immediate vicinity. If said best land is actually under the farm or mine, they can't reach it.

Crops are grown and harvested over a fixed period of time. The crop condition overlay indicates how many units will be extracted. When a scenario begins, the overlay is based on a calculation of the average conditions over a 70-year period. Conditions thereafter will fluctuate somewhat,



Build your farms on slopes so you can use level ground for buildings.

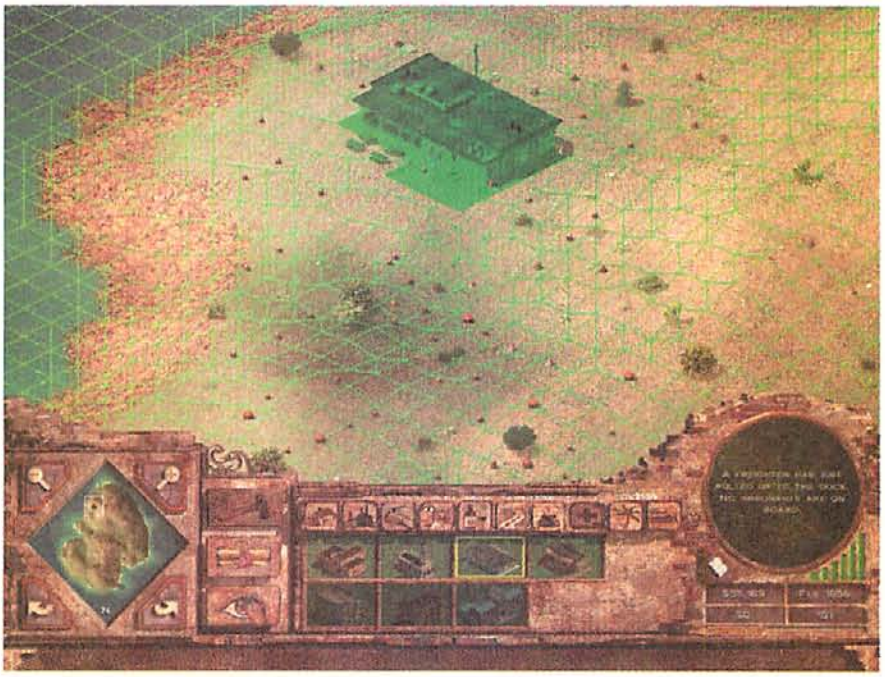


Crop conditions vary with weather, but soil isn't depleted over time.

but there's no need to rotate crops since soil depletion isn't modeled.

Roads can be a particularly baffling part of an island's layout. Tropicans might seem to be just ignoring your expensive network of roads in favor of traipsing across the grass to get where they're going. The solution to this is twofold: First, build roads in long, straight lines that Tropicans are already walking along. Tropicans take shortcuts for short distances, but if they're on a long trip, they'll gravitate more toward the roads. This is particularly true of teamsters when they're traveling uphill or crossing the rocky terrain along some shores with their cumbersome wheelbarrows. You can easily identify the areas around a dock that are most often traveled; lay roads over these areas to make the going easier for your teamsters. Second, you can funnel Tropicans along your roads with construction.

Landscaping isn't just pretty, it's also practical. A solid line of shrubbery will keep pedestrians from straying off the road. And by laying out your buildings in a tight grid and running roads between them, you can set up "urban" areas through which Tropicans will move more quickly.



The undocumented Shift-P command will display a polygonal wireframe of the terrain.

Home Is Where the Job Is

One of the most common mistakes in playing Tropico is approaching development as you would in SimCity, in which you set aside discreet residential areas. When you keep your houses separate from other buildings in Tropico, people will probably have to walk a long way to reach the places where they work. This means they'll get tired sooner while on the job and ultimately be less productive. So one of the most important elements of a successful island layout is allowing people to live near their jobs. Liberally sprinkle housing among your other buildings. When a scenario starts, put bunkhouses near farms and construction and teamster offices.

As you're developing your island, make sure you have vacant housing next to the new structures that will create jobs. Use the Info Mode | Buildings | Occupancy Level filter to check the map. If there aren't enough residential vacancies near the future location of a job-offering structure, build some housing near the site first. The construction priority setting comes in handy here. For instance, to make an armory with fat, happy generals who don't have to walk far, drop the armory plan on the map and set its construction priority to "stopped." Now build enough housing nearby for the number

of generals you expect to hire. When the houses are done, set the armory to a higher construction priority. When the new generals arrive on the job, they'll move into the empty homes right next door.

Another aspect of housing that requires careful management is rent. This is an often overlooked source of revenue. It can be pay off to go through your housing, particularly higher-income housing, and check for inhabitants who don't put much weight on housing happiness. You can raise their rent to the maximum (one-third of the household's combined income) without affecting their overall happiness. Select a house, click on its residents to check their Happiness tabs, then use the Job and House tab to go back and set the rent. Conversely, if residents put a lot of weight on housing happiness, cut their rent to increase their overall happiness. Although this takes a fair amount of micromanagement, it's a subtle and significant way to optimize your income and happiness.

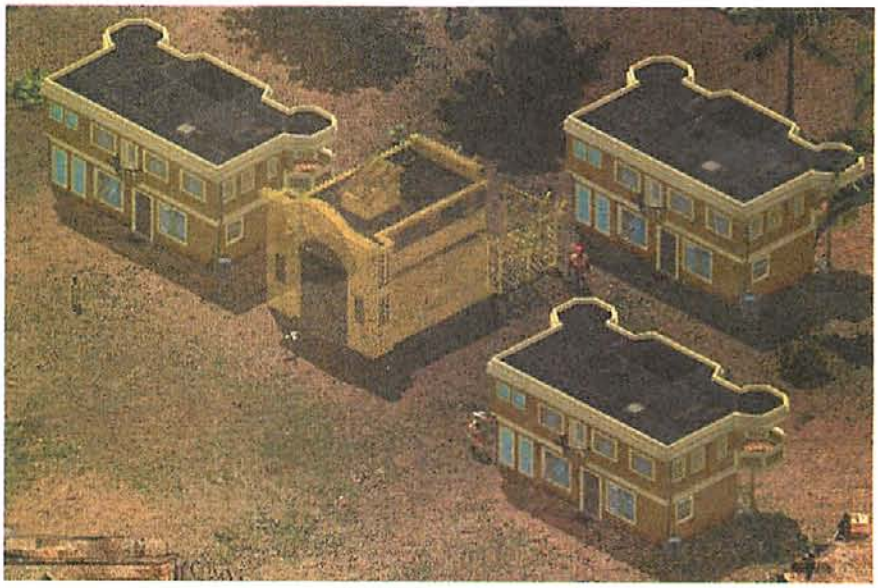


When planning new buildings, use the occupancy overlay to show homes with vacancies.

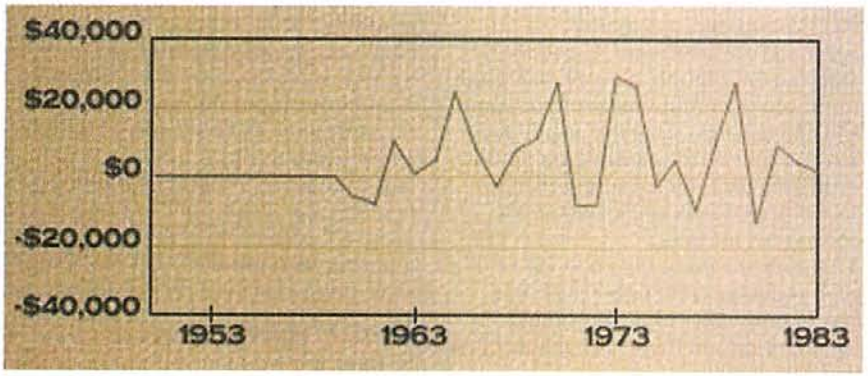
Riding the Revenue Roller Coaster

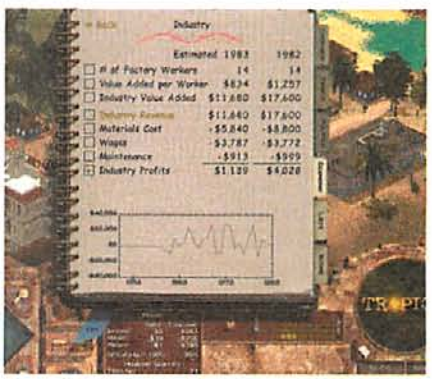
A big problem in TROPICO is the late-game ping-ponging of income. For instance, one year you'll have an income of $20,000, and the next you'll have a deficit of $20,000. Suddenly, the World Bank steps in and interferes with your wage structure, toppling your carefully calibrated economy. Although you can't entirely avoid ping-ponging, here are some ways to manage it:

1. An export economy is only as strong as the teamsters and dockworkers who move the goods. Fine cigars are useless to you until they've made their way from a factory to the hold of a freighter. So make sure teamsters and dockworkers are happy and living near their workplaces. Watch all your structures for high output queues (greater than 10 units), which might indicate a teamster

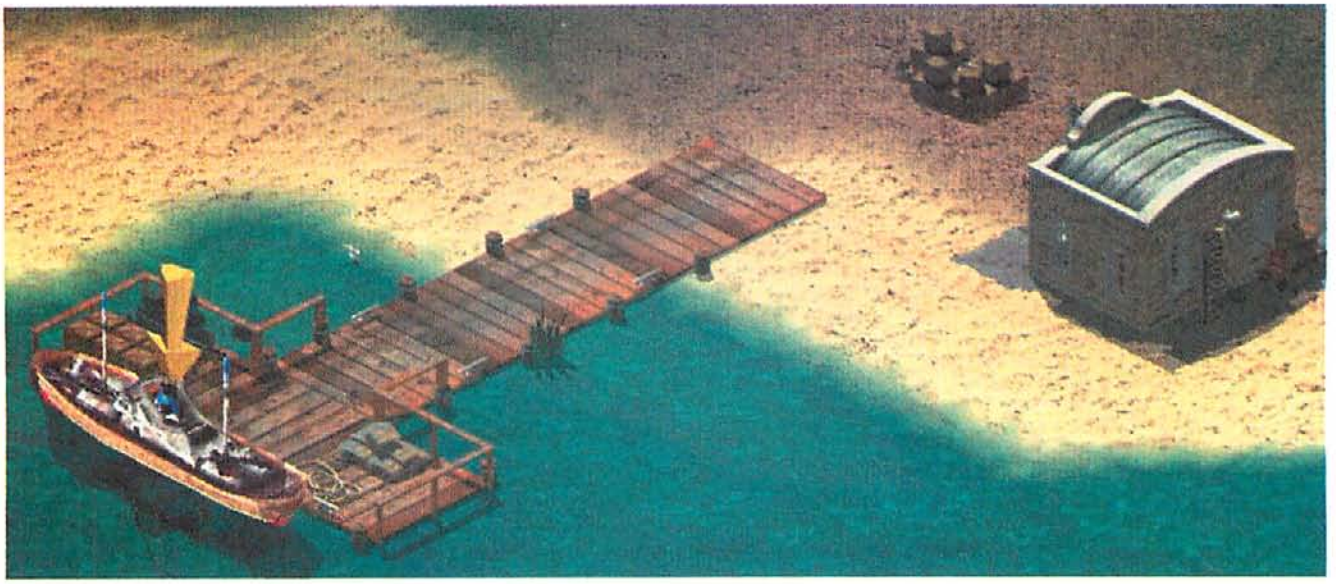


An armory surrounded by new luxury houses where the generals can take up residence.

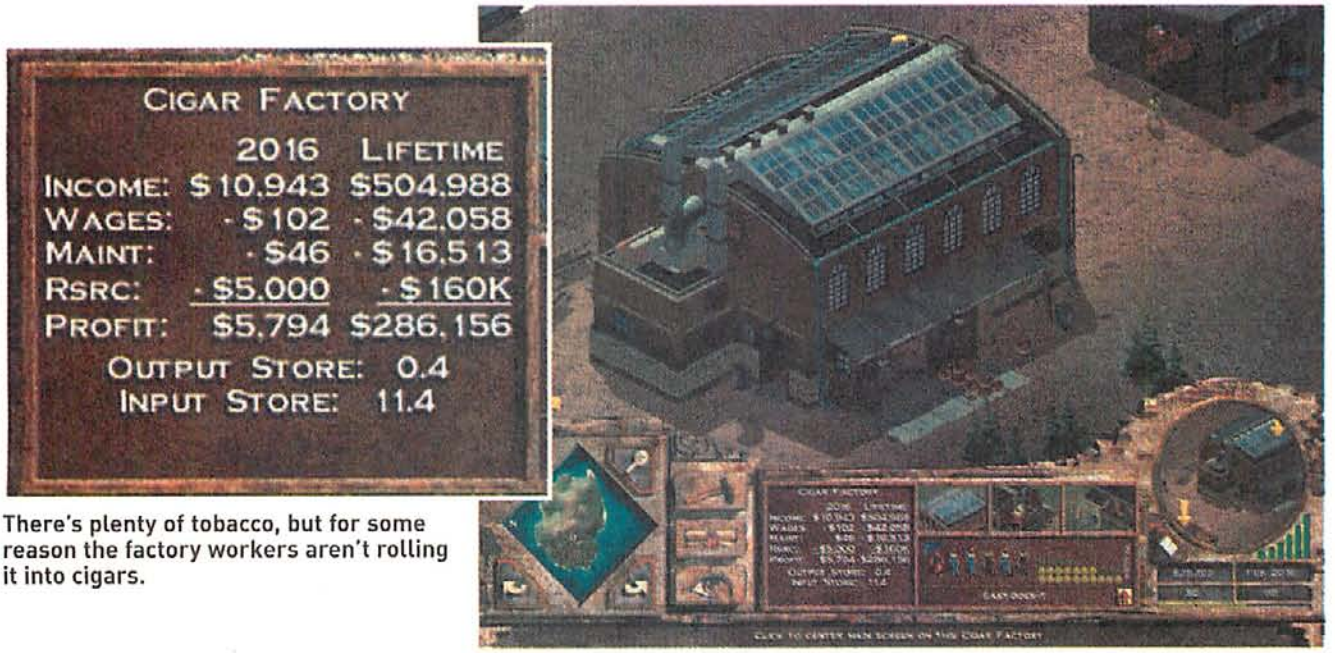




Your profits won't be consistent, so be prepared.



A dock with a backlog like this is a sure sign of a dockworker shortage.

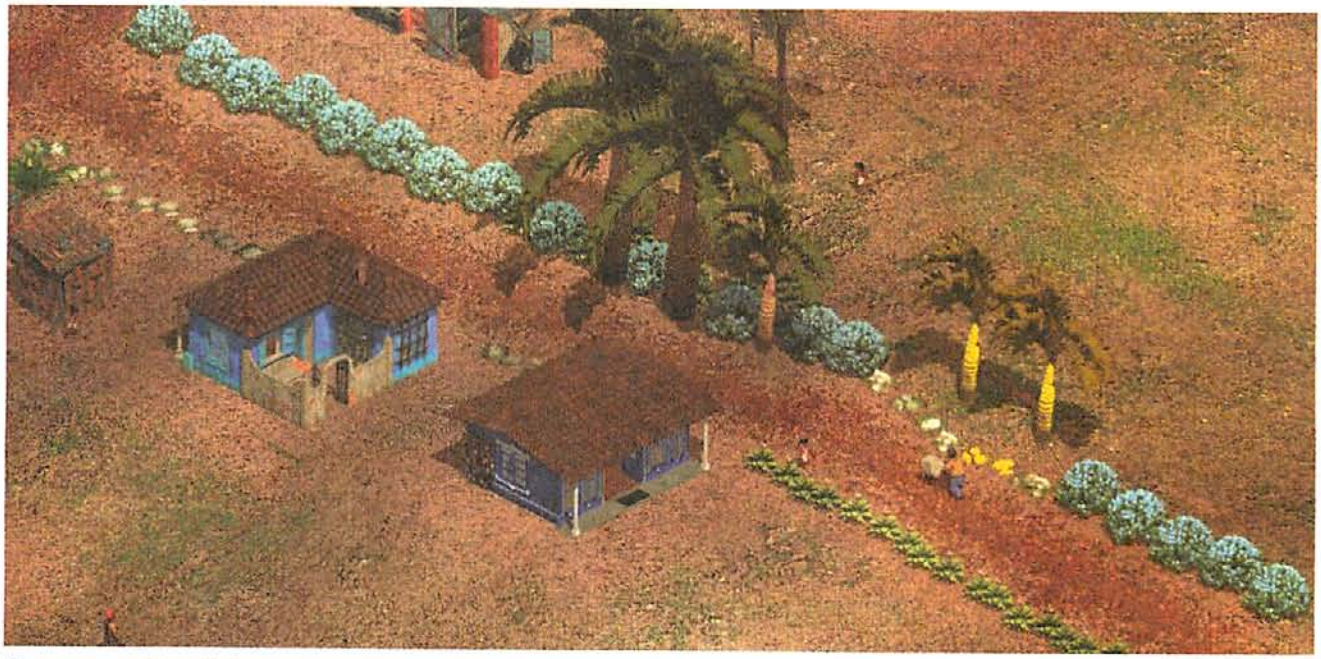


There's plenty of tobacco, but for some reason the factory workers aren't rolling it into cigars.

shortage. Keep a full staff of dockworkers or goods will pile up on your docks.
2. Don't rely exclusively on high-dollar-value goods. Advanced industry has too many bottlenecks that can interrupt the flow of income. Supplement factory goods with raw exports such as fish, metals, logs, cattle and goats, and unprocessed cash crops. Also, periodically check factories for input queues greater than 10 units. This might indicate that you're producing too many raw goods, that you don't have enough factory workers, or that your factory workers live too far from the factory and aren't working long enough hours.
3. Don't make the common mistake of relying exclusively on exports. You can also make money from rent, entertainment, foreign aid, and tourism.
4. Grow at an steady rate. Suddenly dropping $45,000 into a new industry can cause you to rack up considerable wage and maintenance costs that might put you in a downward economic spiral. Build at an even pace and be sure to watch your overall wages and maintenance costs in the almanac.
5. Later in the game, try not to let your treasury dip below $10,000. This is a healthy buffer zone that should keep your coffers from dipping into negative numbers.
6) Don't get too generous with wages, which are an enormous drain on your income. When you have a lot of money, it can be tempting to jack up Tropican job happiness by throwing raises around. Instead, keep an eye on the Caribbean Average Pay in the People | Income Disparity page of the almanac. You can afford to pay the lower classes slightly less if job unhappiness isn't a widespread problem. But if you're feeling generous, use the Caribbean Average Pay as a minimum for your uneducated workers, and scale it accordingly for educated workers.

Your Friends and Superpowers

While you're busy with domestic



Line your roads with landscaping to keep the people on track.



Make nice with the United States and get your airports at half price.



Carefully groom your soldiers to build a strong military, and you've got it made.

politics, don't overlook international relations. Although a $5,000 Diplomatic Ministry is expensive, it's well worth it in the long run, no matter what kind of scenario you're playing. In addition to the foreign aid diplomacy can net, careful and regular use of diplomatic edicts can be a major boon. These can be issued only once every two years, so be sure to note when you can issue a new one. For instance, on the Settings screen, keep the Annual Almanac option enabled even if you don't use it. Then issue a diplomatic edict every other time it comes up.

Development aid can be an important part of building up your island. Although the reduced cost of housing you get from Russia is helpful as your population grows, you can't afford to neglect U.S. development aid if you're going to start a tourist trade. The airport discount will more than pay for the cost of the Ministry building, and a cheaper power plant will let you build the grand luxuries that upper-class tourists expect. Finally, send trade delegations whenever you can afford it; the paltry $1,000 fee will almost always guarantee some valuable gift.

Men With Guns

For those times when you can't keep your people happy, you'll need a strong and loyal military. Start by weeding any problem soldiers out of your forces. Check each soldier's happiness panel and fire anyone who has a lot of weight in civic matters like religion or entertainment. You want your military composed solely of men who will be happy with a good job and a nice house. Fire everyone with low courage, as these soldiers are more likely to turn traitor or retreat in a fight against rebels. Also fire everyone with low intelligence, as they'll be slow to develop their soldiering skills. As long as you offer high wages, you'll always have new applicants for the vacated positions.

As soon as you can afford it, build nice houses around your palace for your soldiers. Once you have a few good men, develop their soldiering skills by putting the palace on Special-Op Training. It will take someone with above-average intelligence about eight years to completely fill his skill bar. After that, scale back to Normal Training to keep your men happy. Do the same thing when you build armories for generals and guard stations for more soldiers. CGW

DEVELOPER CHEATS

Adventure/RPG

Evil islands

Difficulty ramping up too fast in our spotlight review, Evil Islands? Check out these cheats straight from the developers.

Cheat Codes:
You can't "skip levels," but you can enter any zone you want any time in the game using the following cheats. To activate them you need to open the console by pressing "~" key and enter "**thingamabob**" (don't forget to hit "**Enter**" key after this string).

@leavetozone(0,"name",0)
Instead of "name," you can use the following strings to be transported to the various zones (for example, **@leavetozone(0,"bz1g",0)** brings you to the village on the first island):

Briefing zones:

bz10k	New Green clan's residence
bz11k	Abandoned mines
bz13h	Fortress
bz14h	Last Shelter
bz15h	Old necromancer's tower
bz16h	Secret trading place
bz18h	Cave - meeting place
bz1g	Village

Game zones:

gz10g	Tunnel
gz11k	City environs
gz12k	Abandoned mines
gz13k	Karansul's domain
gz14k	Forbidden catacombs
gz15h	Death canyon
gz16h	Wormheads' cave
gz17h	Necromancers' desert
gz18h	The city of Suslanger and its environs
gz19h	Portal

Note that the game is going to be really hard if you just skip around between zones. You'll probably also want to enter these codes if you are exploring:

@godmode(0,1) gives you invulnerability to any attack; it also allows you to run without stamina drain.

@godmode(0,2) same as previous, but all your attacks automatically hit and kill ALL living things (even if it is impossible in the normal game).

EASTER EGGS

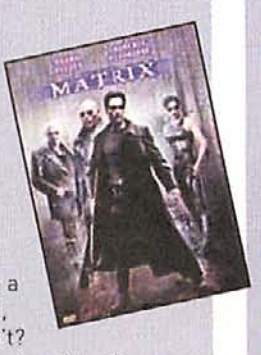
DVD: Alien

Fox Home Video has hidden 3 easter eggs on their 20th Anniversary Edition of Alien.

From the main menu, highlight "Extra Features" and then press the left arrow key to highlight the left window. Press "Enter" and you will see the production credits for the DVD. Now highlight "Scene Selections" from the main menu and press the right arrow key to highlight the other window. If you press "Enter" now, you will see the flight plans of the Nostromo and extensive crew information.

Finally, go to the "Extra Features" submenu and arrow down until you highlight the acid puddle at the bottom of the screen. If you press "Enter" now, you will be able to see Kane's transmission of the alien's lifecycle.

DVD: The Matrix



You know you have a copy laying around, what gamer doesn't? Didn't you ever wonder, though, exactly how the heck they did that whole "bullet time" thing? Or where the weird, mad ideas for the movie came from in the first place?

To learn more about spinning in the air amidst kicks and bullets, proceed as follows. From the disc's main menu, go to the "Special Features" and there select "The Dream World." Apart from the text menu entries, you'll also see a red pill. Select it, and you will be taken to the "What Is Bullet Time?" documentary.

Also in the "Special Features" section, go to "Cast & Crew Bios," and there select the Warchowsky Brothers. This'll bring up another red pill. Select it, and it takes you to a 12-minute documentary called "What Is Concept?"

MORE CHEATS



Majesty

While playing, press [**Enter**], then type the following codes:

victory is mine	Win Game
now you die	Lose Quest
i'm a loser baby	Lose Game
fill this bag	Add 10,000 Gold
revelation	Reveal Map
build anything	All Buildings Available
give me power	All Spells Available
cheezy towers	Spells Have No Range Limit
restoration	Restores Hit Points
grow up	Highlighted Hero Gains +5 Levels

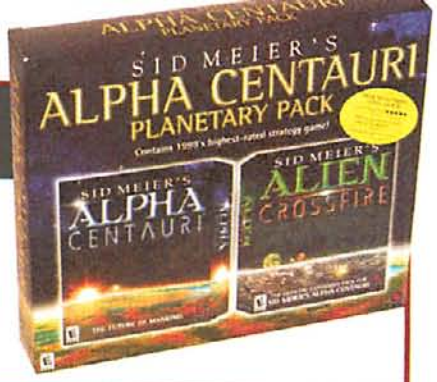


Serious Sam

Use [~] to bring up the console window and use these codes:

Code:	Result:
please god	God Mode
please giveall	Give All Items
please killall	Kill All Enemies
please open	Open All Doors
please fly	Fly Mode
please ghost	No Clipping
please invisible	Invisibility

DIRTY TRICKS OF THE MONTH



There've been so many dirty tricks sent in, that we decided to print a whole smattering of them this month. Apparently, RED ALERT 2 is the most oft-played game out there, as there have been more dirty tricks for that one game than all others combined. This month's prize goes to another COUNTER-STRIKE trick. Next month, you'll be trying to snag a copy of the CGW Editor's Choice title, SID MEIER'S ALPHA CENTAURI PLANETARY PACK.

WINNING TRICK!

This is a trick (well, let's not use the word trick—tactic is a better word) for the game COUNTER-STRIKE and on the Terrorist team. Personally, I hate it when I'm a terrorist and after I plant the bomb, a couple of others and I fight furiously to defend it to let it go off, but sometimes the ball doesn't land in our court. After the firefight, guess what—one Counter-Terrorist (CT) survives with what, 5 health? Then he prances merrily to the bomb that is placed in an easily accessed area, and then disarms it, washing away all our hard work and then the computer mocks us with "Counter-Terrorists Win!" After that round, you hear groans, curses, and any other nasty expression from the Terrorists. Here is a solution to that very problem, a very easy solution. COUNTER-STRIKE is about teamwork right? Well, with a little teamwork, the bomb could be placed in a very inaccessible place. In most bombsites, there are crates or boxes lying around next to the target zone. All that is needed is one of the terrorists to crouch down next to a box and boost the bomb carrier up. He jumps onto the big box and plants the bomb. So if a firefight does ensue and a CT survives, he can't get to it by himself. Or, if a few of them survive, they usually scurry around looking for the bomb and they usually don't have the teamwork idea in mind to boost each other. In conclusion, they get blown up and sent flying, giving all the Terrorist players a good laugh. There are many tricks to bomb placing, it's just finding them. That's the dirty trick, erm, I mean tactic. **—Hao-Wei Tseng**

Readers Rip Through RED ALERT 2

This is a really mean multiplayer trick for RED ALERT 2. Play as any of the Soviet countries. You will need at least one engineer along with the ability to build Tesla Coils and Nuclear Power Plants. First, complete construction on a Nuclear Power Plant and a Tesla coil, but do not place them. It's not essential, but I recommend sending an attack force to one side of your opponent's base. Send your engineer to the other side to capture a building. It doesn't really matter what building, but if you can manage to get a base defense structure without getting killed, that's best. Immediately place your Nuclear Power Plant and Tesla Coil by this building. The battle at the other side of the base should keep them occupied while you do this, and give you the chance to build up at least one more Tesla Coil to defend against engineers trying to claim your power plant. Your enemy now has two choices: They can leave it alone, allowing you to build a base off of your power plant—which can be very good for creating troops and tanks—or they can destroy it, filling their entire base with nuclear radiation. Either way, you win. **—Mike Welch**

Hi, I writing this to tell you the dirtiest trick I've found in RED ALERT 2. During the soviet single-player campaign, if you have a psychic unit of any kind, there is a nice sneak attack trick that I figured out. If on the map there are any school busses, have the psychic unit take one over; next, fill the truck with two of your strongest infantry units and three engineers. Before loading them, make sure you have put the engineers into their own numbered group, so you can select them quickly. Now drive the bus into the enemy's base near a building you wish to take over. Because it is a civilian vehicle, the enemy will not attack it. Once you are right next to the building, unload your troops. Select all your engineers and order them to take over the target building. If you are close enough, this will almost always work.
—Alan Fullerton

I have been getting sick of seeing people send you strategies for RED ALERT 2 that either: A) came with the game, or B) are very obvious so I thought I would send the dirtiest trick of them all! I like to call it... (Drum roll please!) The Base within Base Strike. It only works when the "BUILD OFF ALLY CON. YARD" setting is on. The first step is to be sure that you ally with someone of the other team (Soviet ally with Allied and vice-versa). If you are the Soviet of your alliance, you should focus on getting an Iron Curtain online and have your Allied Forces ally build a Chronosphere. Once both are fully charged, chrono a MCV into the middle of the enemy base and quickly deploy. Both you and your ally should have had defensive structures built, but not deployed. Now, both you and your ally should deploy the defensive structures next to the new Construction Yard. The Soviet ally should then Iron Curtain the two defensive structures and the Construction Yard if possible. The enemy will be helpless as your buildings destroy theirs! Once land is a little cleared, and with a little luck, you can deploy a Barracks and a Tanya or two in the middle of their base. Try to wipe out as much of the enemy base as possible. It would be a good idea to also get some engineers into their buildings and then sell them to help support the new base. To some, this may seem like a totally stupid plan, but if you catch the enemy totally off guard, they are screwed. **—Nima Nikzad**

You need quite a bit of money and power plants to do this trick. First, you need to make sure that you have a long-range gun (e.g., Tesla Coil, Prism Tower). Then you need to make sure you've got plenty of power plants and money. Here comes the devious part: You keep building Tesla Coils or Prism Towers as far apart as possible, in a line that goes towards the enemy base. When you reach the enemy base with Tesla Coils, it will just destroy their base. Since you have so many Tesla Coils or Prism Towers, it won't take very long to build a new one (the more you build, the less time it takes to build another one). If they attempt to send troops, you can just build more Tesla Coils or Prism Towers that would kill them. You also might want to add some

sentry guns in there, because they will probably send rocketeers. So far, no one has been able to overcome this trick when I played it. **—Stephen Herrick**

To make this dirty trick work, you need to be the soviets. You need some crazy ivans and some terror drones. Oh, it's so simple yet so devastating. Gather up a good amount of terror drones and about 2-4 crazy ivans. Now put a group number on both the ivans and the drones. Quickly place a bomb on all of the drones and send them into a nearby base. The base should be pretty close, because the fuse on an ivan bomb is pretty short. Race the fast deadly drones into a base, and send them into the nearest plane, tank, or group of troops. Once in a plane or tank the drone will begin to rip the vehicle apart. Well, if timed right, the drone can rip the vehicle apart and leap out with the bomb still attached, looking for its next victim. The drone will continue to destroy vehicles until the bomb goes off, which also destroys the vehicle—not to mention wreaking havoc on nearby troops, structures, buildings, etc. Oh, the sheer destruction, think of ten or more bomb-filled terror drones scattering through an enemy's base. The destruction would be catastrophic! **—Jonathan Liechti**

One particularly nasty trick that was used to brutal effect on me by a friend in RED ALERT 2 was as follows: He would create five or so chrono legionnaires. Then he would zap them out to some desolate spot on the map along which my ore trucks traveled, like near a bridge or some such, where I wouldn't notice. Then he puts them on guard, and whenever one of those particularly dumb ore trucks rolled along, he would zap it.

The nasty part of the trick is that when something is chrono'ed out of existence, you don't get that little "Unit Lost" chime, so basically I lost all fifteen of my ore trucks without even knowing it. Finally I start to get low on cash (like really low), and I realized that I hadn't seen an ore truck in a while. By then it was too late. I no longer had enough cash to build another truck. That was precisely the point at which he rolled me with prism tanks. Youch.
—Frank deBros

Old-School Blizzard Corner

Ok, here are my contenders for Dirty Trick(s) of the month.
Remember STARCRAFT? Well, here're some quick ways to end a match quickly and cause a great amount of anguish to the poor suckers you pull these tricks on. (I haven't seen any of these posted before, so here we go...)

1. The Photon Creep
Are you a dastardly Protoss player? Right at the start of the game, start scouting with one of your probes. Carefully (read: without being seen), sneak a probe behind a stooge's (stooge = enemy schmuck) mineral line. Build a pylon just out of visual range. Build photon cannon. Repeat as necessary. Watch as stooge's mineral gatherers get killed, and player is eliminated in the first few minutes of the game. Laugh maniacally.

2. The Sunken Colony of Doom
Are both you and a stooge dastardly zerg players? If the stooge is inattentive, send a drone to his base in the early game. When the stooge is not looking, build a creep colony and then a sunken colony right on stooge's creep. To really drag it home, accompany with a zergling rush. Watch stooge's units die. Laugh maniacally.

3. Elite Fighting Force Probes
This works best if there are computer players on the map. Send one of your drones (probes, SCV's, whatever) into a computer base right at the start of a game. Hit one of the computer's drones and then flee like a madman. Chances are that all the computer's probes will then start chasing down your probe—at which point, feel free to lead them into a stooge's base. Severe annoyance to follow. Watch and laugh maniacally.
—Gary Ng

I've got some tricks for STARCRAFT when I play online. One of them is if you are playing with some allies against humans, and your allies are killed, there are a few little words you can type in to aid you. Simply type in (your STARCRAFT name) has left the game. Now, make sure all your units are completely still, and they don't fire on the enemy. Some of your less intelligent enemies will leave thinking that they are victories. Even if one of them is still there, it makes it a lot easier. Trust me. I've used it tons of times. **—David Wilson**

On Battle.Net, find and join an all-out deathmatch game for WARCRAFT 2 that has about 4-7 players in the game. Make sure you are the humans, and that there is at least one other human team who isn't going to be your ally.

Once you join, quickly form an alliance with 1 player. Before you place your plan into action, train about 10 mages and position them near your ally's base, but not too close, because you don't want him to become suspicious. Once this is done, verify that you have easy access to the route your ally's peons take to get to the goldmine.

While your ally is busy being engaged in a battle, use 5 of your mages to cast invisibility on the other 5, and turn off your alliance with your ally to enable your mages to attack him. Of course, he won't know. Charge your now-invisible mages toward the peons and use each mage to cast polymorph on a different peon, and then send them scurrying back to your base before the invisibility wares off. As soon as the polymorphs are complete, change your alliance with your ally back to "ally." Repeat this trick many times and you can wipe out all of their peons. You can also do the same thing to wipe out assorted soldiers.

After you do this, wait patiently. Nothing feels more gratifying than to see all the "WTF?"s and "Who the hell is polymorphing my peons!?"s popping up on the screen as soon as your ally discovers his new flock of sheep.

But the beauty of this trick is that your ally will automatically suspect that the enemy human team is the culprit, since he didn't see you morph all of his gold miners (thanks to invisibility), and wouldn't think his ally would do such a thing. Framing your opponent is a marvelous thing. **—Franz LaZerte**

Send us your tips

Send your tips, tricks, and strategies to cgw_letters@ziffdavis.com (please put cgtips in the subject line).

We'll publish three submissions each month. Please send genuine tips or strategies instead of cheat codes cut-and-pasted from the Internet. One winner will get something pulled at random from the Computer Gaming World BozoBin©!

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by Thomas L. McDonald • cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

Layin' the Smack Down at EA

What in the world is EA.com doing?

Electronic Arts could stride the massively multiplayer realm like a colossus, yet it continually makes short-sighted, silly decisions that undermine the future of its core online gaming enterprise, EA.com. This past spring, the company showed all the foresight of Neville Chamberlain when it canceled ULTIMA WORLDS ONLINE: ORIGIN and shuttered one of the finest development houses in the business. At the same time, it pulled the plug on HARRY POTTER ONLINE after forking over $100 million for Harry Potter rights, effectively pitching millions more in potential revenue out the window.

In May, Electronic Arts announced that it was getting rid of its popular volunteer programs for its online games in North American and Europe. While making the announcement, the company praised the volunteers:

"Whether answering questions, creating intriguing and amusing events, or aiding their fellow players in any number of ways, these volunteers have enriched their own ULTIMA ONLINE experience and helped fulfill the ULTIMA ONLINE experience for so many other members of the UO community. . . .Over the last several years, players volunteering in ULTIMA ONLINE have assisted their fellow players with great creativity, aptitude, and grace. So naturally, we fired them."

Okay, so I added that last line, but it's hard not to read it that way. Why did EA do this? Certainly the class-action suit filed last year by a group of dim-witted former volunteers out to make a fast buck didn't help. But if that's what spurred EA's action, it's a classic case of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, since volunteers were a great boon to the community.

The suit is asinine and frivolous in the extreme, but it was probably stoked into existence by EA's decision to strip volunteers of their semiofficial status and free accounts. This wasn't a bad program; it was just badly handled. If EA is going to encourage fans to fulfill some of the community-building duties of paid staff, there should be a little quid pro quo. Staffers can't help everyone, especially when you keep firing them.



To hell with all that money from ULTIMA ONLINE! People will gladly line up and pay to play POPPAZOPPA!

In any case, more layoffs almost certainly loom at EA.com, which has not been able to meld the successful premium UO with its ambitions for a gaming content/portal site. Quick test: Try to find UO on the front page of EA.com. Never mind; it's not there, although BUNNY LUV gets prominent space. EA will either raise the price of UO to $15 or lump it into the premium EA.com package. Ms. Golden Goose, meet Mr. Meat Cleaver.

"Just so we all have this straight: EA is going to build a premium pay-to-play service by firing all the people with years of online gaming knowledge?"

EA.com's lineup showed adequately at E3, with EARTH AND BEYOND, MOTOR CITY ONLINE, SIMS ONLINE, and the rash-inducing MAJESTIC all demoing behind closed doors. Despite a tricked-up, premature demo, SIMS looked to be what it should be, able to connect people in all the ways they want to be connected without too much fuss. It should be doing this about a year from now, leaving BUNNY LUV to bust its fuzzy tail to keep EA.com earning until then. MOTOR CITY is okay, but it may not be quite the community-building monster people pony up the green for month after month. Finally, EARTH AND BEYOND might wind up being good, but at E3 it seemed rather pedestrian. It defies all logic that EA would turn to Westwood to create an online space game while letting a little license called WING COMMANDER (or even PRIVATEER) dissolve into dust, along with the team that made it. Remember the massively multiplayer WING COMMANDER game Andy Hollis was supposed to do? That's the kind of thing gamers would sacrifice small children to play, but it never made it out of the gate.

Just so we all have this straight: EA is going to build a premium pay-to-play service by firing all the people with years of online gaming knowledge, like those at Origin and Kesmai. This is akin to communist "cultural revolutions" in which they kill all the smart people and wind up with an economy based on manufacturing draft stoppers and toilet ducks.

I hate to be the bearer of obvious news, but unless the company turns around quickly and pulls a fully developed and tested SIMS ONLINE out of some orifice, EA.com is toast, since no one is paying to play POPPAZOPPA. With its assets and position in the online community, EA is sitting on a gold mine, if only it would stop lobbing bombs at it long enough to just dig. CGW

by Stefan "Desslock" Janicki ▪ desslock@desslock.com

Battle of the E3 RPGs

The role-playing renaissance continues

E3 is all about battles. Exhibits battle for attention. Camera crews jockey for position in front of the most impressive demonstrations. Booth babes battle vainly to hide their obvious disdain for the event. Media representatives battle their need to sleep so that they can have more time to partake of the seasonal festivities (that is, get loaded). Fight, fight, fight! Tora, tora, tora!

So it seems apt to announce Desslock's fifth annual Best RPG of E3 winner in blow-by-blow, dog-eat-orc fashion. This year's E3 was an abysmal show for PC sim, adventure, and sports games, but it was a surprisingly great show for first-person shooters, strategy games, and role-playing games—including massively multiplayer online RPGs.

Significant exhibits were devoted to ANARCHY ONLINE, SHADOWBANE, and DARK AGES OF CAMELOT, all vying to be the second-generation MMORPG that displaces current online gaming king EVERQUEST. EVERQUEST creator Verant certainly wasn't passively waiting to be dislodged, though—the company unveiled both an impressive EQ expansion, SHADOWS OF LUCLIN, and the most stunning game of the entire convention, STAR WARS: GALAXIES.

Single-player RPGs were all over E3, of course. My top five are listed below; bubbling right under those were BLACK ISLE STUDIOS: TORN and POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR. It's going to be a great year.

Desslock's Top E3 RPGs

5. STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

BioWare finally unveiled its upcoming STAR WARS game, which is set 4,000 years prior to the events of the core Star Wars trilogy. The developers have improved the already impressive engine used by NEVERWINTER NIGHTS and added the ability to depict landscapes of tremendous scope. The lightsaber effects are perfect.



4. DUNGEON SIEGE

In many ways, this game looks to deliver the experience that DIABLO II should have delivered. DUNGEON SIEGE provides action-oriented gameplay in beautiful environments and abandons stodgy RPG conventions such as class restrictions to permit players to develop their characters in a more natural fashion.

Why it beats KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC: While BioWare hasn't yet demonstrated much gameplay in its title, DUNGEON SIEGE's hacking and slashing is already addictive.

3. ARCANUM

Last year's winner was displayed a final time prior to its release, and the game still looks to deliver some of the most original settings and gameplay ever featured in a role-playing game.

Why it beats the others: Although it can't compete graphically, ARCANUM has far deeper gameplay than DUNGEON SIEGE and it's stocked full of content that's more interesting than BioWare's technology demo for KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC.

2. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

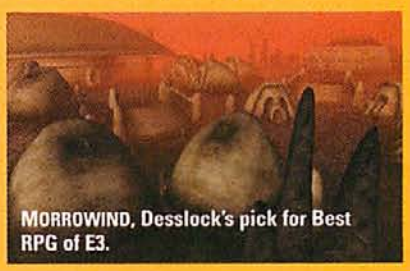
While there's still a great deal of game content to be produced, enough of the game has been revealed to make it clear that this title should be the most significant *D&D* game ever, and BioWare hasn't made a mistake yet.

Why it beats the others: Even without its included Dungeon Master feature, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS would offer the most comprehensive multiplayer features of any game on this list. It should deliver a full adaptation of *D&D*'s new Third Edition rules and also features amazing lighting and graphical effects. ARCANUM can't compete graphically or in multiplayer; DUNGEON SIEGES's gameplay is simplistic by comparison; and KNIGHTS OF THE REPUBLIC is an earlier-stage game from the same developer using a similar engine.

1. MORROWIND

There's never been any doubt that Bethesda had the creative talent to develop an outstanding RPG, but the company has been notorious for producing games that are horribly unpolished. MORROWIND brings back many of the features that made DAGGERFALL great, including a skill-based development system, a huge world to freely explore, and the ability to establish a vocation in the guild of your choice. But the random layouts and sprites of DAGGERFALL are gone, and every inch of MORROWIND's tremendously varied world is handcrafted and rendered in astounding 3D graphics. MORROWIND promises to provide players with an incredibly detailed and interactive 3D world.

Why it beats the others: MORROWIND features an editor that's as powerful and accessible as the one included with NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, and players can insert their creations directly into the main game, integrating their characters, monsters, and locations (Desslockville?) with Bethesda's constructs. MORROWIND is single-player only, but gameplay is deep and accessible and its world is at least as interesting as ARCANUM's, as malleable as NEVERWINTER NIGHTS', and as beautiful as DUNGEON SIEGE's. It's been hovering a little under the radar for a while, but ultimately, MORROWIND was a surprisingly easy pick for Best RPG of E3 2001. CGW



MORROWIND, Desslock's pick for Best RPG of E3.

by Bruce Geryk • ceremony@net66.com

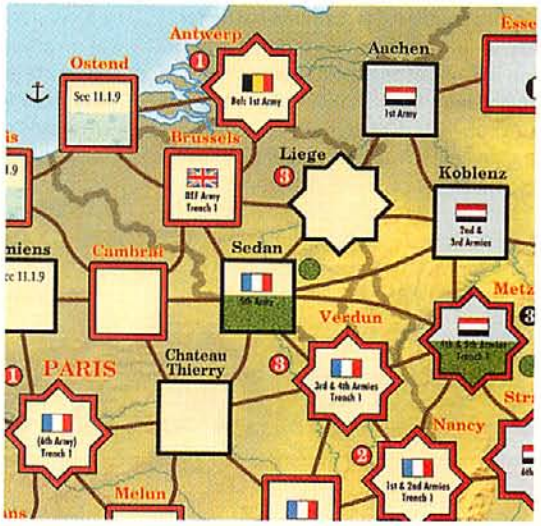
Rip van Winkle

Wargame designers fall asleep in 1970, wake up in 2001

A few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of being introduced to noted German boardgame designer Reiner Knizia's *Lord of the Rings* (Hasbro/Parker Brothers). Knizia is a legend in boardgaming circles, and after 10 minutes of playing *Lord of the Rings*, it was easy to see why. Using only four understated and standard-looking boards, two decks of cards, and some cardboard markers, Knizia managed to capture the essence of the drama in Tolkien's story and package it in a clever game system that makes each play-through different and challenging. The gameplay is also cooperative. Can you say "genius"?



PATHS OF GLORY uses two decks of cards as part of an ingenious game system.



The Western Front in PATHS OF GLORY is made up of some connected boxes—and a whole lot of great gameplay.

This got me thinking about the current state of computer wargame design, and the contrast immediately became apparent. Despite the incredible canvas for the expression of ideas afforded wargame designers by advances in computer technology over the past 10 years, the games I'm seeing (with the notable exception of COMBAT MISSION) are essentially better-looking versions of the ones I was playing on an Apple II back in the 1980s. And those games were simply crude renditions of the standard board wargames of the 1970s. So it's probably not too farfetched to say that many of the computer wargames we play today are 30-year-old concepts dressed up in modern clothes.

"Computer wargame designers have the entire virtual world at their disposal, yet spend their time trying to re-create old tabletop standards."

Unfortunately, this situation doesn't appear to be changing. Looking at the list of upcoming wargames, all I see are variants of the cardboard stuff that's sitting unplayed in my closet. They're the same World War II games all over again, with hexes. Or extensions of existing game systems with new scenarios but no new ideas. What's the deal?

Brain Lock Can Be Fatal

Earlier this year, a colleague sought my help in replying to a gamer who had asked him to recommend a computer game based on the American Revolutionary War. My response was that the last historical Revolutionary War game I could remember was Koei's LIBERTY OR DEATH. That's from 1993. These days, the only Revolutionary War gaming you can do on your computer is John Tiller's CAMPAIGN 1776 and perhaps some add-on scenarios for Shrapnel Games' HORSE & MUSKET. And these are tactical games, with no higher strategic level. Meanwhile, the only way I can play Avalon Hill's outstanding WE THE PEOPLE boardgame is by email.

Not too long ago I pulled GMT Games' (**www.gmtgames.com**) classic PATHS OF GLORY off the shelf. This is a wonderful simulation of World War I done in a very streamlined fashion that nonetheless presents the basic strategic problems of the conflict and makes a challenging and absorbing game out of them. Its combination of point-to-point movement, low unit density, and the variation introduced by action cards makes it one of the best board wargames I've ever played. You know what's comparable to it on the computer? Nothing.

The Dustbin of History

It may seem contradictory to complain that computer wargames are too fixated on their boardgame predecessors, only to turn around and hold up boardgames as worthy of emulation. But the point is that a designer like Knizia is constrained by the limitations of paper and cardboard and limited rule sets, yet he somehow consistently manages to break free of convention and deliver unique and enjoyable creations. PATHS OF GLORY designer Ted S. Raicer is similarly imaginative. Computer wargame designers, on the other hand, have the entire virtual world at their disposal, yet spend their time trying to digitally re-create old tabletop standards. Am I the only one who finds this ridiculous?

I realize that certain wargame topics are more popular than others, and that it's difficult to design a game that will please serious wargamers and general game fans alike. But with their lifeless execution and fixation on tired conventions, I'm afraid that computer wargame designers are hastening the genre's demise. If future historians even notice our hobby, they'll most likely be unable to distinguish computer wargames released in 2001 from board wargames released in 1970. I wonder what the museum exhibit will look like. Of course, I'll be dead by then. As will our hobby. CGW

by T. Byrl Baker • tbyrlbaker@msn.com

Bard's Tale Returns!

Fans bring back one of PC gaming's classic RPGs

At last, fans are bringing BARD'S TALE back. The first real RPG I ever played was the original BARD'S TALE on my Commodore 64. I remember buying grid paper to map out all the dungeons and kicking down the doors of every dwelling in Skara Brae in search of action and adventure. Now, thanks to a team of fans fueled by the same fond memories, the BARD'S TALE series is set to continue on the PC with THE BARD'S LEGACY: DEVIL WHISKEY (**www.bardslegacy.com**).

The team is crafting a game with the same basic interface as the original—a stat window at the bottom, scrolling text on the right, and a viewport on the left—but with graphics and gameplay options detailed enough to entertain a modern audience. A few new races, including the vicious Saurians and the agile Senrats, complement the usual assortment of elves, half-orcs, gnomes, and other familiar species, while exotic new entries in the class system, such as Psi Knights and Saurian Red Claws, round out the standard list of rogues, fighters, monks, and of course, bards.

DEVIL WHISKEY uses grid-based movement that will be familiar to anyone who played the old-school RPGs, but the pseudo-3D environment will be replaced by detailed 2D illustrations of monsters and NPCs. Once this shareware title is complete the team plans to work on THE BARD'S LEGACY: DARK RESURRECTION, a sequel using a true 3D environment with 3D creatures and objects. For the record, the team wants to make it clear that its games are inspired by the BARD'S TALE series, but are not affiliated with Interplay or the original games in any way.

Team member Jon Starnes says DEVIL WHISKEY may be out by the time you read this, but the team would rather delay it than release a bug-ridden game. All I can say is, take your time. I've waited this long to see the BARD'S TALE universe re-emerge; a few extra months won't kill me. CGW





The BARD'S TALE series is returning to the PC in the form of a shareware game called THE BARD'S LEGACY: DEVIL WHISKEY.

Wargame HEAVEN

I didn't even see it while I was there, but online reports indicate that one true wargame was shown at E3. Fortunately for grognards, wargames represent perhaps the only genre that independent, talented companies can keep alive. Wargames require more research than resources and don't depend on graphics. Best of all, they can have internal workings complex enough to appease the most demanding gamer, yet make everything accessible via an interface that a rank novice can understand.

In any case, wargames aren't dead; they aren't even on vacation. If you need proof, check out what Shrapnel Games' (www.shrapnelgames.com) development partners are doing. ProSimCo's ARMORED TASK FORCE is shaping up to be an incredibly detailed simulation of modern combat, with units modeled down to the individual vehicle and the incorporation of real-world concerns like the presence of civilians on the battlefield. There's also Shrapnel's own ALL AMERICAN: THE 82ND AIRBORNE AT NORMANDY, which promises to pick up where its older, unsung tactical game—101: THE AIRBORNE INVASION OF NORMANDY—left off.

Shrapnel isn't the only publisher giving wargame developers a chance. HPS Simulations (www.hpssims.com) continues to cater to hardcore wargamers, and Strategy First (www.strategyfirst.com) is living up to its name by putting WATERLOO, STEEL BEASTS, and EUROPA UNIVERSALIS in stores everywhere. By the end of the year, Battlefront (www.battlefront.com) should be giving wargamers a taste of the Eastern Front with COMBAT MISSION 2, while Matrix Games (www.matrixgames.com) keeps cranking out upgrades and campaigns for STEEL PANTHERS: WORLD AT WAR.

Matrix has other games on the way, including the operational-level BATTLELINE and COMBAT LEADER, and also publishes 2 By 3 Games' (www.2by3games.com) titles, including makeovers of WAR IN RUSSIA and PACIFIC WAR. The hole the naysayers are pointing to isn't a grave. It's a trench, and independent wargame designers are jumping in to take arms against—and end—a sea of troubles.

by Gordon Berg • cgwletters@ziffdavis.com

E3 Sim Report: Could Be Worse

Two full pages of flight (and train) sim coverage! See, it's not dead!

Lately, it's been getting a lot tougher to justify my role here at the magazine. As the number of new flight sims diminishes, the number of topics I can write about shrinks. Nothing drives this point home more than the yearly pilgrimage to E3, where it's my job to report on what I find. During the rest of the year, I can fib to the editors and tell them everything is fine and please keep sending me a paycheck. But this annual E3 column always exposes me for the lying dog that I am. Each year, I'm forced to get more "creative" and make do with the fewer and fewer new titles on display at the show.

To be honest, I'm partly to blame for this predicament. As much as I hate to admit it, most of the problem stems from my narrow definition of the word simulation. Based on my past columns, it would be more accurate to call this section *Inside Gaming: Space & Combat Flight Simulations*. My attitude thus far has been that if I can't shoot a gun or missile from something that flies, I'm not interested. Not only has this has precluded me from covering all the civilian flight sims out there, but now that I think about it, I haven't discussed any tank sims either.

Let's remedy that last omission right now with some tank sim talk: Last year's Sim of the Year candidate STEEL BEASTS is coming to a store near you. Previously available only through mail order, STEEL BEASTS will be published by Strategy First and should be on the shelves by the time you read this. In addition, work has started on STEEL BEASTS 2.

There, now I feel better. But that doesn't help me with the problem of how little I saw at E3 this year.



WARTHOG TO THE RESCUE The A-10 makes a welcome return in LOCK ON.

The E3 Report

This year, CGW gave each editor and columnist the task of sallying forth with assigned questions. While Scooter got to ask the fun ones—like "Do we really care about HALO anymore?" and "What's the next DAIKATANA?"—I was given the highly original (and highly inevitable) "Are flight sims dead?" We've been here before and the answer is still no, they're not dead—now they're merely French. It turned out that UbiSoft was the only booth that had any sort of flight sims on display. Excuse me, I mean that had any sort of real sims on display—those that shoot down stuff. Worse still, there were only two of them. Fortunately, those two sims were damn impressive, and I'm not embellishing the truth this time. Honest.

LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT

Known formally as FLANKER: ATTACK, this sequel to FLANKER 2 will, according to producer Carl Norman, "attempt to be the impossible: all things to all people." The intended approach with LOMAC is something that's often been requested by consumers and journalists alike: a user-friendly survey sim for beginners that can be dialed up to be as hardcore as you want to make it. The biggest change will come in the form of the new planes you can fly, because the campaigns and missions are no longer restricted to Russian aircraft. Now we get to see Strategic Simulations' take on the venerable F-15, and hallelujah, we're finally getting what should be the A-10 sim of our dreams. Avoiding the phrase every developer hates ("dynamic campaign"), LOMAC will employ a "dynamic battle generator" that will keep persistent track of resources throughout a campaign. Better still, the campaigns are being put together by Matt Wagner, formerly of the JANE'S F/A-18 team. In an effort to make the experience more "fun" (a vague term for simulations if



UbiSoft's IL2 STURMOVIK









WE HEAR THE TRAIN A COMIN' Be sure to check out the September issue for our review of TRAIN SIMULATOR.

there ever was one), real emphasis will be placed on creating a higher immersion factor than FLANKER 2 had by including more frequent radio chatter and other ambient touches.

IL2 STURMOVIK

UbiSoft's recent acquisition of BlueByte Software meant that IL2 STURMOVIK ended up right next to LOMAC on the E3 show floor. It also means that IL2 will move to store shelves instead of being available only via mail order. This sim looks better with each new build, and the version at E3 looked far superior to the pre-beta copies I've seen. In fact, many have already hailed IL2 as the best-looking sim they've ever witnessed—and it's not even out yet! Originally scheduled for release by now, IL2 is now slated to be out this November (UbiSoft requested a new training module and the AI programmer took ill). Granted, the planes are easy to fly, but that's because lead developer Oleg Maddox believes that those planes were easy to fly in real life. Modeling just about every aspect of the Eastern Front during WWII that you could imagine, the sim should be a hardcore enthusiast's dream. No wonder I haven't encountered this much buzz over a flight sim in a long time.

Odds and Ends

Also in UbiSoft's booth were the WWII naval simulations SILENT HUNTER II and DESTROYER COMMAND. SILENT HUNTER II was once erroneously reported to have been cancelled (uh, by us...I think), but it looks alive and well. It will be released roughly around the same time as its counterpart, DESTROYER COMMAND, allowing for some multiplayer interaction between the two titles. While I can see how hunting convoys in SILENT HUNTER II could be appealing, I suspect that it's going to be a challenge to make the gameplay in DESTROYER COMMAND interesting enough to warrant its development as a stand-alone title.



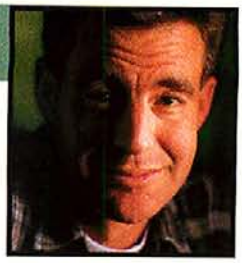
Microsoft's FREELANCER

On the Microsoft front, two noncombat sims and one space sim were being shown: FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2002 (a new FLIGHT SIMULATOR? now there's a shock), the new TRAIN SIMULATOR, and FREELANCER. I didn't even bother with FS2002, but quickly glanced at the train sim. If Microsoft can tap the HO-scale crowd that builds massive tracks in their basements, it's going to have a huge hit on its hands. There was even a *Murder on the Orient Express* scenario. Staying true to my sims-are-better-with-guns theory, I couldn't help wishing it had a WWII scenario that would let me man an antiaircraft gun, allowing me to defend a supply train from strafe attacks. Or perhaps a *Broken Arrow* scenario that would let me kick John Travolta's ass and blow up some boxcars. Although FREELANCER looked fantastic, its release is still a ways off, and I wonder how much the trouble surrounding Digital Anvil will affect it in the end. For something that was Game of Show two years ago, it sure seemed lost in the shuffle this year.

Finally, there was further proof of the flight-sims-with-guns/French theory. Infogrames, which has pitted itself against UbiSoft in the race to control All Things Gaming, has actually done something with the FALCON 4 license it inherited from Hasbro: It has allowed newly formed developer Force 12 to secure the rights to make FALCON V. Force 12 will be headed up by former ibeta team member Eric Marlow (ibeta was the team that helped Hasbro make the final FALCON 4 patches).

The interesting story will be how FALCON V and EFALCON—which many consider to already be the fifth FALCON—will coexist. There will definitely be more on this in a later column. At least that's what I'm telling the other editors. Paycheck, please. CGW

by Jeff Green



It's All Good

Or, how I learned to stop worrying and love the consoles

Here at Greenspeak Central, we don't take too kindly to gaming platform snobs. We also don't take too kindly to pretentious dweebs who refer to themselves as "we," so we're going to stop that right now before we get mad and hit ourselves on the head.

Being a gaming platform snob is easy to do. I should know—I was one myself. Actually, I received my training at the most hardcore (and misguided) snob school there is: Our Holier-Than-Thou Lady of Macintosh Gaming. Before I was strapped down, took the red pill, and assimilated by the Microsoft Borg, I once held on to the naïve and somewhat cute notion that the Mac was destined to take over the gaming world. That happened at about the same time, incidentally, that I was predicting that little green aliens would land on Earth and colonize my rear end. I'm not sure which idea was more far-fetched, but let's just say that, so far, a team of doctors has not been able to figure out what this rash is, and last night I got this really weird phone call from NASA.

■ ■ ■

But I understand what it's all about. (Gaming, I mean—not my ass.) Validation. We all want to feel that our preferred gaming machine is the best one. We don't want to feel like we made a mistake.

The E3 convention this year—covered elsewhere in this issue—was a gigantic console love-fest, and as a PC gaming guy, it was a tad scary. Between the avalanche of hype surrounding Nintendo's GameCube and Game Boy Advance, Microsoft's Xbox, and Sony's PlayStation 2, PC gaming was this year's ugly stepchild. Yeah it was there, and yeah there was actually a lot of great stuff, but not many people—including those traitors at Microsoft—wanted to talk about it much.

"I'm here to see your PC games," you'd say, and they'd give you a wistful, pitying smile, as if you just told them that your dog was dead.

"The PC games are back there," they'd say, pointing to a plywood door in the back of their booth. You'd follow their gaze, and see a closet-like room with one lone PC set up, and a forlorn-looking bearded developer leaning against it, alone, picking his nose. "We were just getting ready to disconnect it, but I guess we could squeeze in one more demo."

"But it's the first day of the show," you'd say. And then they'd give you that wistful, pitying smile again.

■ ■ ■

As the editor-in-chief of a computer gaming magazine, I have as much a vested interest in seeing PC gaming thrive as anyone, if not more so. If this industry collapses, that's pretty much it for me. It's not like I'm qualified to do anything else. I'll just go back to sitting on my couch drooling all day—as opposed doing it at the *CGW* office and getting paid for it.

"We don't need to get defensive and self-righteous because of all the console hype..."

But what I want to say this month is just this: Don't worry about it. I saw great games on every platform at the show, and I'll tell you right now that I'll be buying Nintendo's GameCube the day it launches. That was the machine that most excited me, and was the first thing I checked out when I arrived—I admit it. And by the time you read this, I'll already own a Game Boy Advance.

But, see, this has nothing to do with my PC gaming habit, which is as healthy and strong as ever. I love playing PC games. It's why I work here. It's still my platform of choice. Right now I would kill anyone who got between me and my copy of Strategy First's KOHAN: IMMORTAL SOVEREIGNS, the best real-time strategy game I've played in a long time—and a game that would never work on a console. The best PC games at E3—STAR WARS GALAXIES, AGE OF MYTHOLOGY, and MAJESTIC among them—were all titles that, again, will work and thrive only on the PC. And if STAR WARS GALAXIES ends up being half as good as the E3 demo, that game is going to be huge—and former hardcore "consoles only" fanboys are going to be buying PCs just to play it.

So let's avoid the bunker mentality, gang. We don't need to get defensive and self-righteous because of all the console hype, and start bleating to one another how PC games are "better" than console games. Because you know what? They're not. They're just different. The best games on each platform make transparent, organic use of that platform's strengths—and they can rarely be duplicated elsewhere. The three best games I'm playing now—KOHAN, PAPER MARIO on the N64, and ZELDA: LINK'S AWAKENING on the Game Boy Color—are all wonderful gaming experiences that could only work on the platform they were made for.

So open your eyes. Don't be a snob. You may be the hardest of the hardcore PC gaming grognards, but to the rest of the world, you're just a big dork like the rest of us. And the sooner you get over yourself and slouch on down to the bar with the rest of us lowlifes, the more fun you're going to have as a gamer. CGW

Jeff's transparent Nintendo suck-up is obviously nothing but a cheap ploy to get a free GameCube. Make him feel bad and dirty at jeff_green@ziffdavis.com.

Check out the archives of Jeff's Greenspeak columns at **www.computergaming.com**

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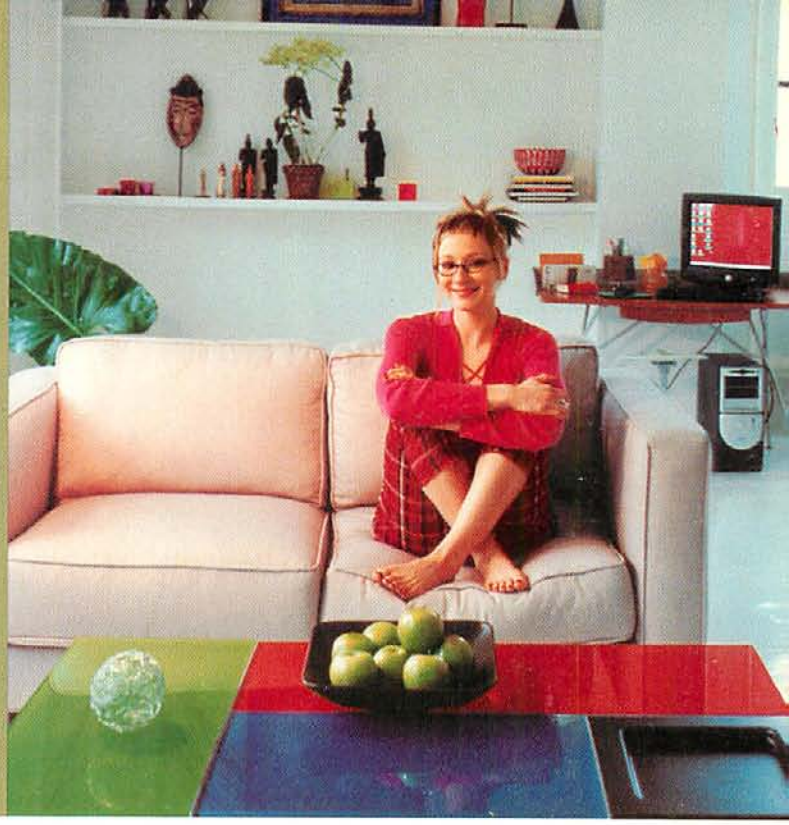
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